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Back cover: "Kingfisher" by "Sandy" Proctor

Cover photograph: A female red-breasted
merganser dries her wings
by Bob & Barb Lindholm

Photo to left: Capt. C. A. Richardson landing a
fish off Tarpon Key by Capt. Fred Everson

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By Ken Haddad, *Executive Director*
Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission



As a result of an ecosystem found no place else in the world, Floridians enjoy a unique and highly sought-after quality of life. Its fish and wildlife resources are at the center of the state's one-of-a-kind environment. Florida's fauna is so bountiful and diverse that it has spawned a multi-billion dollar recreational and commercial economy that provides significant benefits to all state citizens.

The use and enjoyment of the state's natural resources is the right of every citizen. It is also our collective responsibility. Floridians and visitors to our state have a significant impact on the environment and the fish and wildlife resources that it supports.

The health and diversity of these natural treasures is almost wholly dependant on programs based on an ethic of responsible conservation stewardship. These stewardship programs are led by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) in partnership with Governor Bush, the legislature, other state and federal agencies, private conservation groups and, last but not least, individual citizens. Because fish and wildlife resources are communal assets, the FWC has actively sought public involvement in charting a course for its management.

The FWC is actively working for conservation stewardship – and working with citizens – by soliciting interested parties to engage in public dialogue. The agency continues to hold public meetings, reaching out to individuals and communities that may be affected by new management proposals or agency rules. In addition, public discussion and input on Florida's Wildlife Initiative, and summits on hunting, fishing, wildlife viewing, boating and other outdoor activities have been held, some by using the latest video conferencing techniques to encourage statewide public participation.

The FWC's efforts at engaging stakeholders, resources users and the general public are made on behalf of the health and sustainability of the state's fish and wildlife resources and its economic components. The future of those entities now hangs in the balance, and that future will be determined by actions taken or not taken within the next several years. With a strong commitment to the FWC's conservation stewardship programs by our all our public partners, the future of Florida's fish and wildlife resources can be as bright as we want it to be.



Published by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
 Our mission: *Managing fish and wildlife resources for their long-term well-being and the benefit of people.*

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Florida Wildlife (ISSN 0015-4369) is published bimonthly by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission: Marathon Building; 2574 Seagate Drive; Suite 101; Tallahassee, FL 32301-8974. Materials in *Florida Wildlife* include copyrighted materials that are the property of individual contributors. Application to mail at periodicals postage rates is pending at Tallahassee, FL. Written permission to use the Publisher's materials will be granted by the editor for non-commercial, public informational purposes. Manuscripts, photographs and other submissions are received only with the understanding that the Publisher assumes no responsibility for any loss or damage. Contributors should visit *Florida Wildlife's* Web site or write the editorial office for guidelines before sending materials.

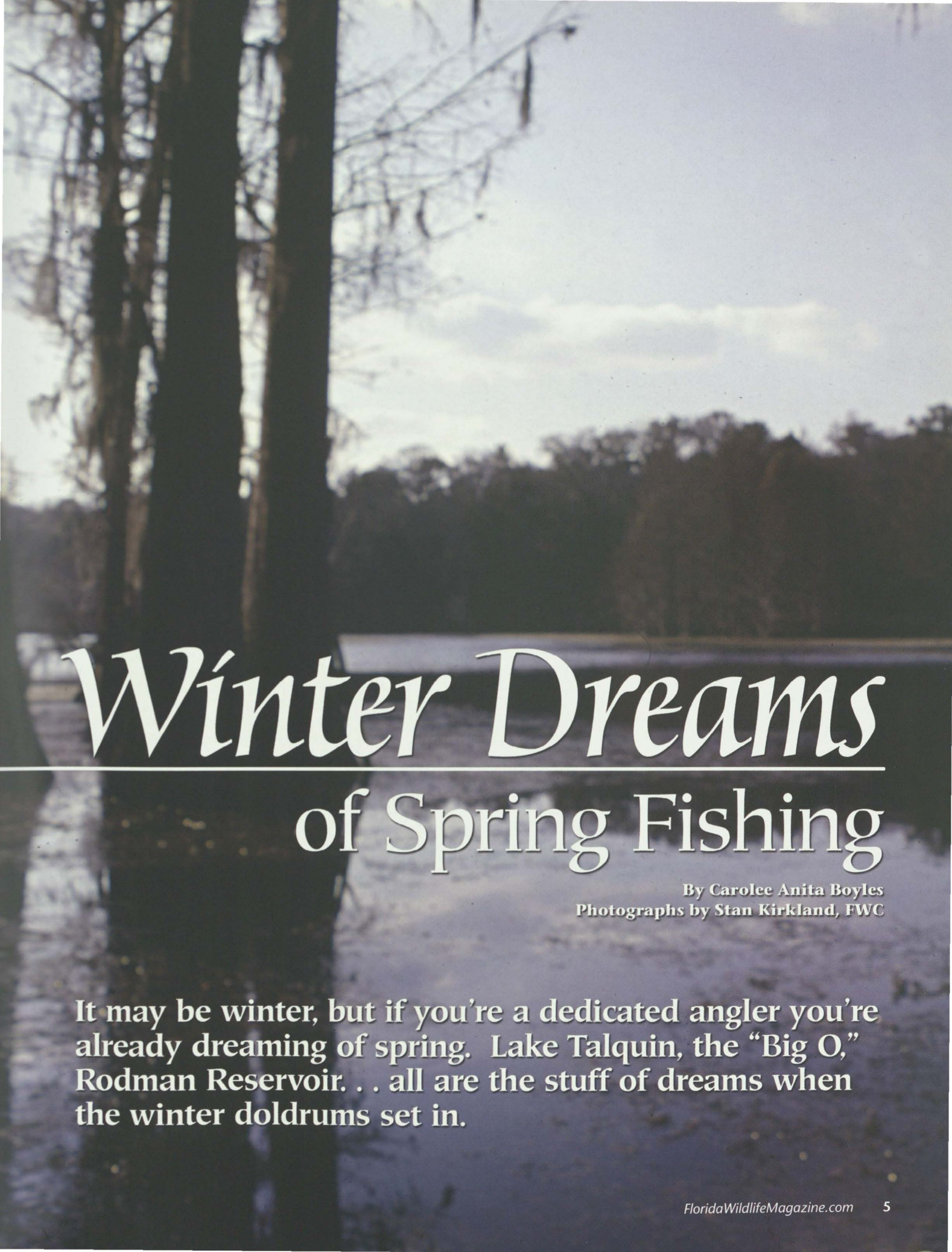
POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Florida Wildlife Magazine,
 P.O. Box 6150, Tallahassee, FL 32314-6150

Single copy price \$4. Subscription rate for one year is \$19.95 (6 issues), two years \$39.95 and three years \$59.95. To subscribe, write *Florida Wildlife*, P.O. Box 6150, Tallahassee, FL 32314-6150. For subscription orders, please call 1-866-967-5600.

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Winter Dreams of Spring Fishing

By Carolee Anita Boyles
Photographs by Stan Kirkland, FWC

It may be winter, but if you're a dedicated angler you're already dreaming of spring. Lake Talquin, the "Big O," Rodman Reservoir. . . all are the stuff of dreams when the winter doldrums set in.



Aerial view of Hurricane Lake

But those big waters aren't the only places to fish. Tucked away in various parts of the state are small ponds and lakes that offer fishing that's as good, or better than you'll find in the big lakes. Six of those little lakes — Stone, Victor, Karick, Bear, Hurricane and Juniper — offer Panhandle anglers a better-than-average opportunity for great spring fishing.

To maintain the quality of the fisheries in these lakes, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) has an intensive ongoing management program. Periodic drawdowns expose and dry the lake bottom, which aerates and consolidates organic muck on the bottom. Biologists also have added fish attractors in some of the lakes to help concentrate fish and improve angler success. These attractors include brush bundles that provide cover and habitat, and limerock and oyster shell spread on the bottom to congregate spawning fish, especially panfish species such as bluegill and shellcracker. Biologists also fertilize and lime the lakes from time to time to increase the growth of phytoplankton, which in turn makes them much more productive than they would be otherwise.

The FWC publishes a brochure for each of these little lakes. Each of the six lakes, with the exception of Juniper, has a "trolling motors only" rule. Gasoline motors are allowed on Juniper Lake in Walton County. For complete regulations and current information, consult the lake brochures.

Bear Lake, Santa Rosa County

Bear Lake averages 8 feet in depth, with areas of about 23 feet in depth near the dam and along the old streambed; it's 109 acres in size.

The main fish species in Bear Lake are large-mouth bass, sunshine bass, black crappie, bluegill, redear sunfish, and channel catfish. Catfish, sunshine bass, black crappie and bream are stocked periodically to maintain a good fishing opportunity.

"Spring and summer and early fall are good for bass," says FWC fisheries biologist Bob DeMauro. "Summertime is best for bream fishing. Catfish are generally a summertime-type fish also, although anglers do catch them in late spring and early fall."

Making the most of your fishing time on Bear Lake isn't hard.

"For crappie, small minnows seem to be popular and quite effective," DeMauro says. "For bluegill and shellcracker, wigglers and crickets work real well. Some people have some luck using dry dog food. They moisten it up a little bit where they can put it on the hook. Most people use wigglers and crickets for bream." Good baits for largemouth are shiners, blue or black plastic worms rigged Texas-style or yellow-skirted flutter baits; sunshine bass like threadfin shad, shad-like diving baits, feathered jigs and silver spoons. If you're after catfish, take along chicken livers.



Fishing for bluegills is a favorite pastime for visitors to Lake Victor.

Hurricane Lake, Okaloosa County

Hurricane Lake is a 318-acre artificial impoundment created in 1971 by the damming of Hurricane Creek. The lake has an average depth of 7 feet and a maximum depth of 25 feet, with the deepest areas near the dam and along the old streambed.

The main fish species in Hurricane Lake are largemouth bass, bluegill, shellcracker and channel catfish. Catfish and bream are stocked periodically to maintain a good fishing opportunity.

For largemouth bass, shiners seem to be the best natural bait. If your preference is to use artificials, try blue or black plastic worms rigged Texas style, or a yellow-skirted flutter bait.

"Most people around here use black worms," says John Gray, who fishes the several of these little lakes regularly. "I use red with a black core and blue with a black core. Blue and black ruby works good, and any crawdad worm works good."

For bluegills and redears, try crickets and wigglers. If you're casting or trolling, a good possibility is a white beetle-spin with a black or a white head. And for catfish, that old standby of chicken livers or anything else stinky makes good bait.

One thing Gray notes about fishing for bream is that they tend to bite more at night than during the day.

Juniper Lake, Walton County

At 670 acres, Juniper Lake is the

largest of these little lakes. It's not a particularly deep lake, though; it averages only 6 feet in depth, with some deeper areas along the old streambed and near the dam.

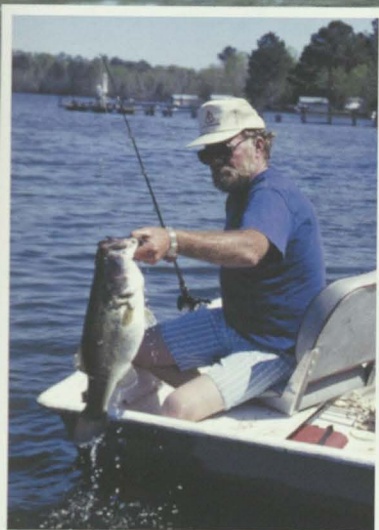
According to DeMauro, this is one of the area's best fishing lakes. Species present in the lake include largemouth bass, black crappie, bluegill, shellcracker, warmouth and channel catfish. You also may see some triploid grass carp, which have been stocked in the lake to help control aquatic weeds, but don't expect to catch them on a hook and line.

If you're fishing for bass with live baits, try shiners and crawfish. They tend to hit purple and other dark-colored plastic worms, as well as black lizards and flutter baits. If you're after panfish, take crickets, worms and beetle-spins. Live minnows are the best bait for crappie, and for catfish, anything that smells bad, especially chicken livers.

"The catfish on this lake are mostly night feeders," Gray says. "They're not big on daylight feeding."

Karick Lake, Okaloosa County

Karick Lake is a small, 70-acre lake that was created in 1965 by an earthen dam across Deadfall Creek. It was opened to fishing in 1966. The FWC stocks the lake periodically to maintain a good fishery of bass, catfish, bluegill and shellcracker. Unlike most other lakes where bass can be kept, all largemouth bass caught from Karick must be released.



A nice 6- to 7- pound bass was caught and released by this Defuniak Springs angler.



Sarah Kirkland proudly holds her hybrid catch.

Angler Michael Nation fishes avidly for bass on the lake, and has some favorite places to fish.

"Aerators are in place to provide oxygen to the water during summer months when bass need it most," he says. "Fishing around these aerators can often be successful. The northern-most part of the lake holds a lot of timber and is great for topwater success. Night fishing is also productive around May and June."

If you're going to Karick Lake for largemouth bass, take along shiners if you can. For artificial bait, use blue or black plastic worms rigged Texas style, or yellow-skirted flutter baits.

"They like mostly black worms," Gray says. "But I've had good luck with fire and ice worms in May and June. Fire and ice worms are red on one side and blue on the other, and sparkly. I've also had real good luck with June Bug worms over there."

Nation says he's had good success with black shad color ribbontail plastic worms. "Soft jerkbaits like Slug-Gos work well when cast adjacent to floating vegetation," he says. "Crankbaits also can produce during springtime in my experience." Karick Lake is an outstanding lake for spring and early summer bluegill fishing. For bluegill and shellcrackers, try crickets or worms, or bring along an ultra-light reel and throw white beetle spins with black or white heads. Catfish will bite anything that's stinky, particularly worms and chicken livers.

Lake Stone, Escambia County

Lake Stone was created in 1967 by an earthen dam across Wiggins Branch, and opened to fishing in 1969. The lake is 130 acres, with an average depth of 6 feet, and a maximum depth of 22 feet; the deepest areas are near the dam and along the old streambed.

The main fish species in Lake Stone are largemouth bass, sunshine bass, black crappie, bluegill, redear sunfish and channel catfish. Catfish, sunshine bass, black crappie and bream are stocked periodically, and threadfin shad have been introduced to supplement the food base.

During the fall and winter, bream and crappie fishing are at their best.

"People start catching bass pretty early," says avid Lake Stone angler Gary Wade. "That starts up in January and February. The bass are usually on the beds the last of February or the first of March, and bream are on the beds in late April."

Going into the summer a lot of the fishing slows down.

"The bass and the bream both bite, but you've got to work for them," Wade says. "In the early part of the summer, try plastic worms. A lot of people use pumpkinseed. In July and August when the young shad are coming up, a lot of people use Slug-Gos-type worms with no weight on them and work them across the surface."

Wade recommends crickets and worms for bream and catfish all year, fished near the bottom.

"Then when the shad start coming up and the bream start hitting them, some people use a fly rod," he says.

Other baits largemouth bass tend to like include shiners, blue or black worms rigged Texas-style, and yellow-skirted flutter baits. For sunshine bass, try threadfin shad, artificial shad-like diving baits, feathered jigs and silver spoons.

For bluegills and redear sunfish try white beetle spins with white or black heads. You can catch catfish on chicken livers, crickets and worms. And for black crappie, try live minnows or silver and feather jigs in the spring.

Lake Victor, Holmes County

Lake Victor was created in 1966 when the old Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission impounded Limestone Branch. Today, the lake is about 140 acres, and averages about 8 feet deep.

Gray says Lake Victor has a good bit of deep water, along the old streambed and near the dam.

"There are several spots that are 30 to 35 feet," he says. "It's got a couple of nice coves and one good creek in it."

Fishing for both bass and panfish can be very good. Channel catfish, bluegill and shellcracker are stocked periodically, and there's a good population of black crappie in the lake that seems to peak every five to seven years.

Gray says Lake Victor is a great lake for crappie fishing.

"The docks on the lake are well kept, and there's a lot of brush around them," he says. "And there are a lot of trees in the lake that stick up out of the water. It's perfect for crappie fishing."

If you're fishing for largemouth bass, DeMauro suggests you try shiners as a good natural bait. He says blue, black and purple plastic worms rigged Texas style, Rat-L-Traps, and yellow-skirted flutter baits are the best artificial lures. Bass fishing tends to be slow during the winter, but it picks up as the water temperature rises into the 50s and lower 60s in late February and early March.

Lake Victor is known as a small trophy bass lake, with the best fish taken in the spring and early summer.

"The average sized bass harvested from Lake Victor probably runs between one and two pounds, or about 13 and 15 inches," DeMauro says. "We don't keep records for individual lakes, but I know there have been a number of bass caught in Lake Victor in excess of 10 pounds."

For channel cats, that old standby of chicken livers is effective most of the time, and wigglers are always good. The limit on catfish has been six fish for a long time, and there's no reason to think that would change, but check posted regulations at the lake.

Bluegill and shellcracker fishing usually is slow during the winter, but it should pick up sometime in mid-to-late March when water temperatures rise into the mid 60s. DeMauro says crickets and worms are generally the best natural baits, while beetle spins with black or white heads are good for casting and trolling. The best time for fishing for these species is mid-May to July.

Dreaming of spring...

Keeping a Wildlife Habitat Journal

Article and Photographs by Betsy S. Franz



Noting when you first see a chrysalis appear gives you a better chance of being there to see a butterfly hatch.

Anyone who has taken the steps to create a suitable 'wildlife habitat' in their landscape can attest to the fact that providing the four basic needs of food, water, shelter and places for wildlife to raise their young really works. It doesn't take long to see an increase in the number of butterflies, birds, bees, dragonflies and other garden visitors to a well-planned habitat.

But are these habitats really making a difference? As a backyard naturalist, you have the incredible opportunity to help prove that they are. By creating a wildlife journal and sharing what you learn, your findings may become the deciding factor to convince the naysayers in your community to put out their feeders and leave their native plants to help restore some of the wildlife habitat that is being so quickly destroyed by rapid land development. You may even discover something during your backyard observations that could help insure the

One highlight of wildlife watching is seeing new members of your backyard family such as this group of playful young squirrels.



survival of a particular species in your own neighborhood and beyond.

There is no shortage in the number of excellent books and government publications instructing and encouraging people to create wildlife habitats. But what does seem to be lacking are the statistics to prove the effectiveness of these habitats. And while the formal studies may be rare, they do seem to indicate what backyard birders have known for decades: if you feed them, they will come.

In 2002, Southwest Texas State University graduate student Amanda L. Hunter studied the effects of backyard habitats and presented her findings in her masters thesis entitled "Comparison of avian communities within traditional and wildscaped residential neighborhoods in San Antonio, Texas". In her thesis, Ms. Hunter reported these findings: "After two years of bird surveys, bird diversity (including independent measures of species richness and evenness) at the wildscaped neighborhood was significantly greater than at the traditional neighborhood or the natural area. This study shows that residential areas that incorporate natural landscapes into their design can attract a greater variety of birds than traditionally landscaped residential areas. These areas may provide valuable habitat for some declining species and reduce the impacts of residential development, especially where urbanization is encroaching on natural areas."

Although official studies like Hunter's are rare,





Your may choose to augment your natural landscapes with special feeders for close-up viewing.

other, less scientific findings, are just as encouraging. In the state of Florida, the number of backyards that were certified in the National Wildlife Federation's Backyard Wildlife Habitat™ program rose from 2617 in 2004 to 3351 in 2005 – an increase of 28%. Coincidentally, figures from the Great Backyard Bird Count showed the number of birds reported in Florida rose from 207,978 in 2004 to 254,320 in 2005 – a 22% increase. But did the backyard habitats have anything to do with the increase in the number of birds? Collecting data from your own backyard experiences might be the best way to provide the proof.

More and more people are beginning to take on the responsibility of sharing their landscapes with wildlife, but it is still a relatively new experience for many. Using a habitat journal to record the creation of a bird and butterfly sanctuary is the perfect way to learn what works and what doesn't. And structured wildlife counts and online forums provide an easy means to share what is learned with others.

The Cornell Ornithology Lab calls people that share their backyard discoveries 'citizen scientists', and finds their contributions invaluable in the study of bird populations and trends. They believe that data from citizen scientists is helping researchers investigate major issues such as the impacts of West Nile virus, global warming and acid rain on birds.

So how do you collect your own habitat data? The best way is to keep a habitat journal. And although keeping lists of the vari-

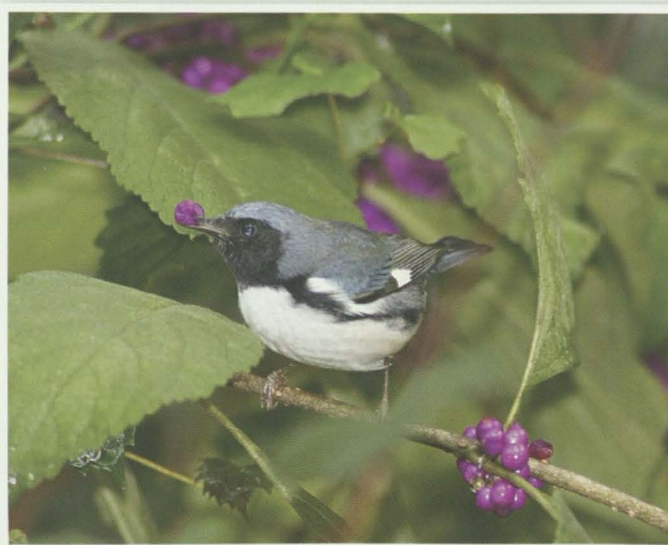
ous species that visit your yard is great for official wildlife counts, recording additional details of wildlife visits, such as which plants are favored, will help you create a more effective habitat. Journal entries also allow you to better monitor the exciting progress of a butterfly — from egg to caterpillar to chrysalis to butterfly — and help you know when to re-hang feeders for transitory hummingbirds.

Keeping a journal is easy. You can use a plain spiral notebook, a blank journal purchased from a bookstore or a journal that was specifically created to record bird and wildlife sightings. If you are computer savvy, you can use a site such as www.blogger.com to create your own wildlife blog – a daily journal of your wildlife sightings to share with fellow surfers on the World Wide Web. However you choose to keep your wildlife journal, make sure you record enough information to be effective.

Always record the date and time of your habitat happenings. Include any contributing factors such as weather conditions or location in your yard. If you aren't sure of the specific wildlife species that you are observing, write down as much information as you can to help identify it later.

Digital cameras are excellent tools for the budding backyard naturalist. Pictures of birds, butterflies and other wildlife can be taken to use for research in reference books, on the internet or to post on wildlife forums.

Once you begin keeping a habitat journal, you have taken the first step to becoming a citizen scientist. You now have the opportunity to pass along your findings to others. Whether you share your findings quietly with your closest friends and family, online at gardening or wildlife forums or



Keeping journal entries of what plants are visited by what creatures will allow you create a more effective wildlife garden. This black-throated blue warbler enjoys a beautyberry treat.



Wildlife young, such as this baby gopher tortoise, are a treasure to watch and to document.

at weekly meetings of your favorite garden club, don't be reluctant to share. Teaching others about your wildlife discoveries can be a valuable gift for both them and the environment.

If you think you've found something truly unique, such as a bird or insect that you haven't seen before, don't be reluctant to ask the experts. Start with your county extension service or state department of wildlife. If they can't answer your question, they may be able to steer you in the right direction.

There are also several national species counts that you can participate in once you begin to keep a wildlife journal. The Great Backyard Bird Count, The Christmas Bird Count and Project

FeederWatch are all studies compiled primarily from information provided by individual citizens. Information about all of these programs, which are joint efforts between Audubon and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, can be found at www.birdsource.org. A similar count for butterflies is carried out annually by the North American Butterfly Association, www.naba.org.

There are many reasons to keep a journal of your backyard habitat. First and foremost, it encourages you to get to know the wild creatures that frequent your property. Although a close-up look at the curiosities and miracles of nature can do much to encourage viewers to appreciate and protect it, many have never stopped to take that first look.

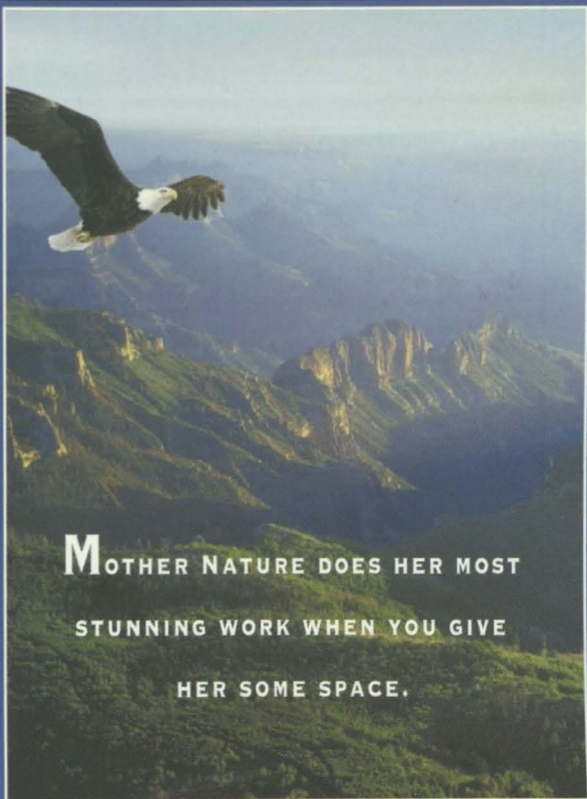
Observing backyard wildlife and nature also provides a perfect opportunity for contemplation and reflection. Your journal provides a place to record those experiences as well.

Whether what you learn from your habitat journal is used to influence local or national government and environmental groups or just helps you better appreciate natural wonders is up to you.

Just remember that experiencing nature is always more important than writing about it. Avoid getting so caught up in the writing and research that you forget to just sit quietly and observe what is around you.

Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings once said "I do not understand how anyone can live without one small place of enchantment to turn to."

Creating a habitat journal can help you to create that place of enchantment. Visit it often.



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-John Berry, Executive Director, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation



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Cool Water Reds

Article and Photographs by Capt. Fred Everson



Bonefish and permit may get all the glory as the toughest sight-fishing targets on Florida's flats, but they don't have much on Tampa Bay redfish. Here, fishing pressure makes redfish as wary and spooky as any fish you will see in the keys. If I wanted to pick a harder fish to cast to in clear shallow water, it would be sheepshead. They are the most nervous fish I have ever seen in shallow water, but I like to see them.

Redfish tour professional Capt. C. A. Richardson told me years ago "Whenever I see sheepshead on a flat, I usually find redfish close by."

Another event that often indicates the presence of reds is needlefish skipping across the surface, according to full-time Tampa Bay Guide Capt. Chet Jennings.

"When you see needlefish skittering on top of the water in a panic, redfish are running them off," he said. He doesn't think that the redfish eat them; it has more to do with the needlefish being regarded as competition.

The prime time for spotting redfish on the Southshore flats of Tampa Bay is November through April when water temperature is below 70 degrees and the surface is free of weeds and algae. Clear water and low tide makes sight fishing practical from a poling skiff, but wading affords more stealth, and stealth is the name of the redfish

that's what wading for winter redfish is all about. What you actually see is not a fish, it's more like looking at the ghost of a fish – a mere shadow. And sometimes, it's not the fish you see, but the wake. Redfish push more water, move faster than mullet and travel in straight lines. The trick is to intercept the moving fish with the lure at the precise moment. Redfish will often spook on the line if you drop it on top of them, or if it comes close in front of them.

Redfish also school up in the winter months – not the big schools of late summer, but small groups of fish that hunt together on the edge of the grass and in the troughs and swash channels around the bars. On the low end of the spring tides around the new moon and the full moon, hunting tails is flats fishing as good as it gets. These fish are rooting around in the sand for crabs, shrimp, sand fleas and just about anything else with a shell on

This is not about fishing for numbers, it's about doing everything right and fooling a fish that's seen it all before.

game. Years ago I could wade all year long in shorts, but my tolerance for cold water has lowered dramatically; now I much prefer the dry, warm comfort of lightweight waders in fall and winter.

I still do my scouting from the poling platform. The advantage of extra height greatly increases the distance at which you can spot fish, but even with the slow quiet motion of the push pole, they will shy away from the boat.

Redfish tend to settle in on certain parts of a flat and hang there for much of the season. They tend to scatter with the passing of each cold front, but will generally regroup a few days later. Reds usually get active ahead of a front, and the best time to spot them is when the tide is near the bottom of the low – with the last hour of the falling tide, and the first hour of the rise is happy hour on the flats. On the high tide, the fish tend to run up onto the grass where they are practically invisible.

Despite gin-clear water and the sunny skies of winter, unless the fish are tailing, they can be hard to see. Redfish that spend some time over white sand in bright sunlight quickly lighten in color to a silvery hue. Even with the best quality polarized sunglasses, spotting the fish is a challenge – and

it. Two fish we caught a couple of years ago had their bellies full of ground-up sand dollars. There's nothing easy about catching these fish. Clear, shallow water makes them skittish and even on foot they are difficult to approach.

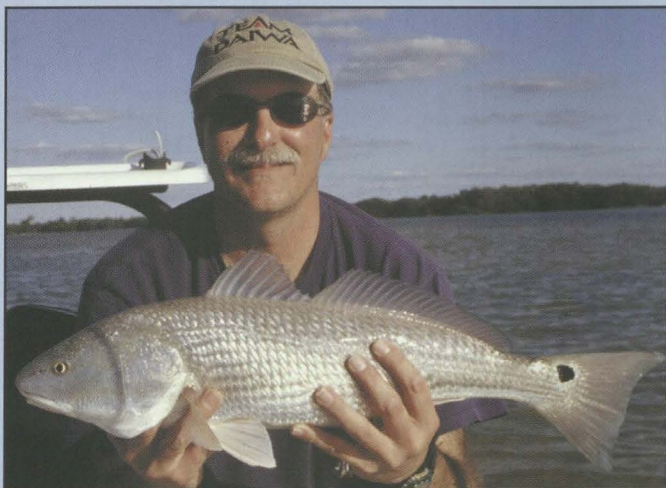
A fly rod is made-to-order for tailing redfish because the fly does not make much of a splash when it hits the water. But the real reason to throw a fly at a redfish is what it does to the rod after you set the hook.

One of the best fish I ever caught anywhere, on any tackle, was a 28-inch redfish on a seven-weight fly rod. I had seen several small fish come up behind the fly, and on my third or fourth cast I finally had a pick up. I had the rod pointed right at the fly, just like it's supposed to be. I even remembered to strip set with the left hand instead of raising the rod tip. When I did, that fish blew a 3-foot hole in the water and took off. Twenty minutes later, the fish got into the backing for the third time. A few minutes thereafter it finally succumbed to relentless pressure and I quickly released it unharmed. Judging from the way the fish took off, I was a lot more tired.

I also like to wade with spinning tackle, which

Capt. C. A. Richardson prepares to land a fish off Tarpon Key, west of St. Petersburg.



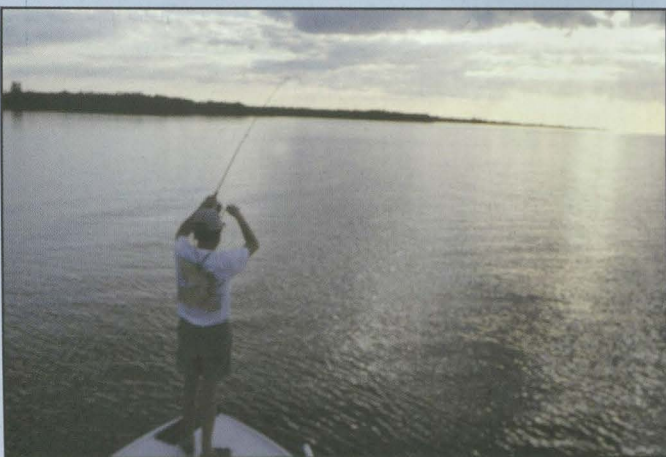


When redfish spend time over bare sandy bottom in clear water, they lighten to a silvery hue.

is less susceptible to wind as is ever present in the winter months. I use an 8-foot-long spinning rod to cast an appropriate selection of shallow water lures. The rod is limber, and will also cast live baits such as medium shrimp or small crabs. I generally do not fish with large shrimp in shallow water. They certainly cast better, but the bigger shrimp also make too much of a splash and will spook more fish than they catch. Mind you, this is an open water rod – it will not pull fish away from structure – but there is little to get in the way on a winter flat.

I fish a small selection of proven artificials that includes jig heads between one-sixteenth of an ounce and three-eighths, with a few different colored tails – light and dark. I fish a red jig head with a root beer colored tail in dark water, or dim light. On bright, sunny days in clear water I throw a white head and chartreuse tail.

When the fish are tailing, I rig a plastic crab or a plastic shrimp. I crawl either bait across the bottom with a slow steady retrieve. The pick-up reminds me of steelhead fishing. There is not really a strike; the bait just stops like it's hung up on the bottom. My method of hook setting is to point the rod tip at the fish and reel until the fish finally takes drag, then put a good



On a rare calm afternoon in November, Vic Stephens puts the rod to a fish.



Plastic crabs are an effective winter bait in clear shallow water.

bend in the rod and keep the pressure on until the fish is whipped.

Four- or five-inch hard-plastic twitch baits that run just below the surface have been effective on days when nothing else would draw a strike. Heavier surface plugs that make noise are more apt to spook fish in water this shallow.

Everyday fishing for redfish is different. When casting to fish I can see, if I make several good casts that don't draw a strike, I will switch lures, and keep switching until I figure out what they want. Some days it's the jig, others it's a spoon or something in soft plastic. I usually drop down to eight-pound test monofilament for cold weather reds, and sometimes I forgo a leader when the water is exceptionally clear, otherwise I like 18 inches of 20-pound test fluorocarbon.

Here, making a good cast to a fish you can see is the quest. Hooking and landing the fish is merely a bonus. Even with live shrimp, you can't expect any sort of frenzy. This is not about fishing for numbers, it's about doing everything right and fooling a fish that's seen it all before. Add to that a strong fish that doesn't tire easily and it's not hard to see why redfish have become the new darlings of professional saltwater tournament fishing.



John Oliverio with a typical Tampa Bay redfish.

“Project Tampa Bay”

Stocking Florida Redfish in Tampa Bay



Fingerling redfish were released as part of Project Tampa Bays' research phase.



Anglers that catch visibly tagged redfish such as the one pictured can assist researchers by calling the Fish Tag Hot Line.



A Project Tampa Bay staff member tags a young redfish.

The Fish and Wildlife Research Institute (FWRI), in partnership with Mote Marine Laboratory, are in the midst of a large-scale redfish (red drum) stock enhancement project in Tampa Bay. Our goal is to increase the number of redfish in Tampa Bay, and to experimentally determine the best sizes and locations for stocking in order to meet that goal in the most cost-effective manner.

Before this project began, an in-depth process was designed and implemented by scientists to identify and prioritize potential candidate stock enhancement species. The process included a survey of many saltwater fishing license holders as well as others with an interest or involvement in recreational saltwater fishing.

Using a variety of criteria, scientists ranked the list of fish developed from the survey. The top three candidates were red drum, snook and spotted seatrout.

Tampa Bay was selected as the pilot stock enhancement site for several reasons. First, it already has an existing redfish fishery as well as an abundance of redfish nursery habitat. Our marine hatchery, called the Stock Enhancement Research Facility (SERF), is located near the shore of Tampa Bay in northwest Manatee County and has been culturing redfish since it opened in April 1988. Also, the FWRI Fisheries Independent Monitoring (FIM) program currently monitors wild fish populations in Tampa Bay and many of its contributing river systems.

The Alafia River is the primary study area and the Little Manatee River is a secondary study area for Project Tampa Bay. These rivers were selected because the majority of juvenile redfish documented in Tampa Bay by FIM monitoring teams over the past 10 years were

captured within these two river systems.

FIM's monitoring efforts provide data on the abundance of redfish in these locations before and after hatchery fish are stocked. This information is important for assessing the effect of the stocking as well as determining what size fish is most cost-effective to release.

The staff at SERF began raising redfish for Project Tampa Bay in August 1999. Stocking for the research phase of the project began in the spring of 2000 and was completed last December. More than 4 million redfish of five different sizes were released.

The test of concept phase of the project involves the release of several million fish of the size or sizes determined by the research phase to be the most cost-effective.

Because our goal is to increase the number of redfish, it is important to stock fish where many people already fish for them. Anglers can help track these fish by taking a fin clip from any redfish caught in Tampa Bay and by cooperating with scientists conducting creel surveys.

We believe that stocking hatchery-reared fish, if done responsibly, can be a cost-effective addition to fisheries management tools such as regulations and habitat protection. It is believed that hatchery-reared fish can be used to restore populations that have been depleted by man-made or natural disasters such as chemical spills or freezes and to supplement weak year classes.

If hatchery fish can enhance existing populations or help restore stocks that have been depleted, future generations will still be able to call Florida the Fishing Capital of the World.

If you catch a tagged fish or need information concerning the fin clip project you may call the Fish Tag Hot Line at 1-800-367-4461.

2004-2005

Florida Hunting Incident Reports

Last hunting season Florida noted only eight hunting incidents. This tied the lowest season ever recorded, 2002-03; however, unlike 02-03 one of this year's incidents resulted in a fatality. By following the rules of safety stressed in Florida's Hunter Safety Course, none of these accidents would have happened.

November 7, 2004, Baker County, Deer

While attempting to climb a pine tree with a cable-type sit-and-climb treestand, the hunter flipped backwards out of the stand while his feet stayed strapped to the foot platform. The tree stand was approximately six feet from the ground. The hunter managed to free his left foot but remained hanging by his right. He fired two shots from his muzzleloading rifle to alert other nearby hunters. The victim remained hanging by one foot for approximately one hour before two other hunters located and freed him. The hunter's right calf and ankle suffered suspected muscle and nerve injury. The victim was not using a safety strap. Examination of the tree-stand revealed no apparent defects.

November 10, 2004, Hamilton County, Duck

While duck hunting in the PCS Phosphate duck area, two hunters set up two small boats about 40 yards apart and placed decoys out in front of each boat. There was a moderate amount of cattails between the two boats, but with effort the hunters were able to see each other. The shooter wounded a duck that landed on the water. The shooter focused on the duck and shot it again as it swam between the two boats. The hunter located in the other boat was hit by one pellet in the upper left chest. The victim was taken to the hospital where a doctor examined the injury. The wound was determined to be non life-threatening. The doctor was unsuccessful in removing the pellet but treated the wound and released the victim.

November 25, 2004, Clay County

Thanksgiving morning, a 33-year-old man decided to check for game at a pile of corn that had been placed in a wooded area north of his father's house. The corn was placed on the ground several days before in hopes of luring a deer or turkey to the area. The man left his father's house to check the corn pile without letting anyone know where he was going. Shortly thereafter, his father exited through the back door and either saw or heard movement in the wooded area where the corn was. He ran in the house and grabbed his 12-gauge over-under shotgun and six shells. He fired one round of 00 buckshot towards the pile of corn without verifying his target and re-loaded his shotgun.

When the father walked into the wooded area to see what he had shot, he saw his son lying facedown on the ground. He noted the seriousness of the injury and ran back to the house and yelled to his wife that he had accidentally shot their son and to call for help. The father then ran back into the woods, removed his shirt and attempted CPR on his son. When his son did not respond, the father placed his shirt over his son's head and sat down beside him. Before the emergency medical team arrived, the father died of a heart attack.

November 28, 2004, Walton County, Deer

At approximately 7:30 a.m. a father and son were deer hunting with dogs on an unnumbered road in Eglin Air Force

Base. The father dropped his son off at a deer stand and proceeded approximately 500 feet north to the next stand. He heard his son's gun fire and went to investigate. When he arrived, he found that his son had shot himself in his right foot with his 20-gauge shotgun. When the son's boot was removed, it was revealed that the shot had severed the toe next to the big toe. He was transported to the hospital where surgeons amputated the toe. The victim stated that he loaded his gun with one shell prior to leaving the house that morning. He stated to investigators that he remembered hearing the dogs barking and recalled resting the barrel of the gun on his foot, but he did not remember removing the safety on the gun. The firearm was inspected by an armorer and determined that the safety mechanism was in proper working order.

January 2, 2005, Lafayette County, Deer

Dogs were chasing a deer east toward a woods road where a mother, father and son were exiting their vehicle. The 13-year-old son moved south on the road while the mother stayed approximately 30 feet from Brushy Hammock Road. The son was directed by his mother to move further south on the woods road. He stopped approximately 267 feet beyond his mother. When the mother heard a deer approaching, she moved to the west of the road into the brush. The deer crossed the woods road between the two, approximately 90 feet from the son. The son shot as the deer crossed the road. Immediately after the shot, the mother stepped back to the woods road and said she had been struck in the calf of her right leg by one pellet of 00 buckshot. The pellet passed through her leg. She was rushed to the hospital where she was treated for her injuries.

January 7, 2005, Pasco County, Deer

The shooter and victim were hunting deer with dogs in Richloam WMA. The shooter shot at a deer as it crossed the road, not noticing the victim downrange. One 00 buckshot hit the victim in the abdomen. The victim was transported to St. Joe's Hospital where his injuries were treated.

January 29, 2005, Walton County, Deer

The shooter and victim were hunting deer with dogs in Eglin Air Force Base. The shooter shot at a deer and the victim was struck on his left thigh with one 00 buckshot pellet which passed completely through his thigh. The victim was transported to Twin Cities Hospital where his injuries were treated.

February 5, 2005, Hendry County, Pheasant

A father and son were participating in an annual continental pheasant shoot when the hunt master sounded an air horn two times, the signal to stop shooting and move to the next shooting station. As they were gathering their equipment to move, the father stumbled and fell forward causing his 12-gauge shotgun to fire. The son was hit in the lower left leg between the knee and ankle with one round of #5 shot. The shot shattered his leg bone and caused massive tissue damage.

The Development of a Multi-dimensional Artist

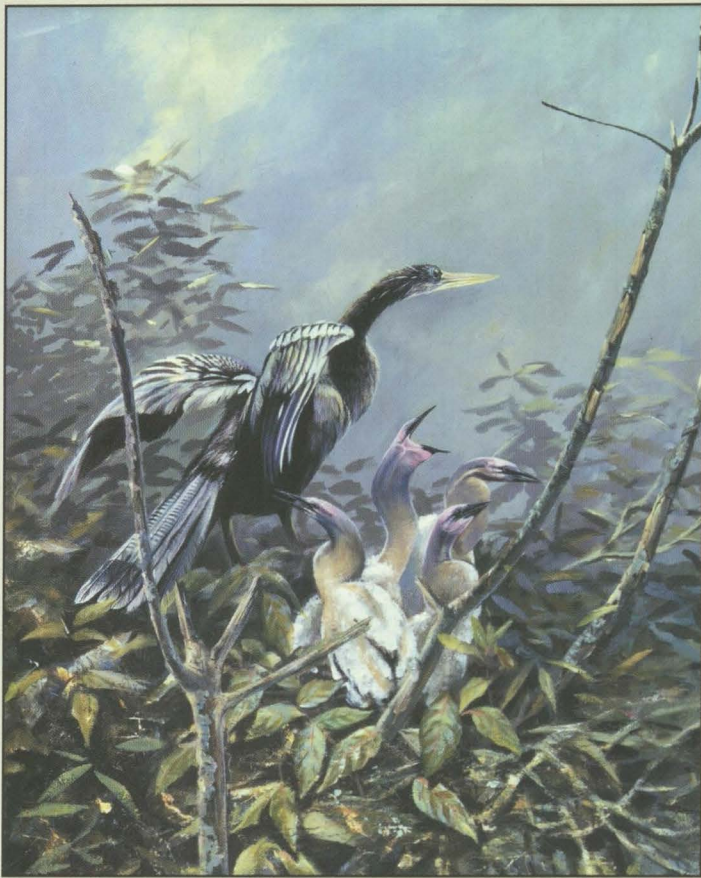
By Andy Lindstrom



"Osprey"

W. Stanley Proctor ©

Sandy Proctor has come a long way since once describing his wildlife paintings as "ducks left" and "ducks right."



"Anhinga"



"Hollyhill Puppies"

For one thing, the nationally recognized Tallahassee artist doesn't do that much painting any more. And his repertoire has stretched far beyond game fowl in flight. Not only are his larger-than-life bronze sculptures installed in such prestigious venues as the Roosevelt Room of the White House, the Polk Museum of Art in Florida and the World War II Monument in Dallas, TX, but recently "Seychelles" – one of his astonishingly realistic pieces of a gracefully stretching nymph – was honored by the National Sculpture Society with its top award for realism.

Not bad for a guy who claims he never took an art lesson in his life.

A member of one of Tallahassee's best known business families whose fortunes were made in automobiles and fuel oil, W. Stanley "Sandy" Proctor doesn't know where he came by his artistic talent. But after graduation from Washington and Lee University and several unhappy years in the world of commerce, he decided to risk it all on his innate skill with a brush and palette.

"Actually, I had always wanted to be a Navy pilot. But I flunked the eye exam," he recalls. "My next choice was to be an illustrator, like Norman Rockwell, because I love figures. I can do figures in my sleep."

Unfortunately, most of the magazines interested in Rockwell-type illustrations were shutting down. So Proctor began dabbling in sporting art, selling his first watercolor at the age of 30. Ten years later, with a wife and three children and, at best, only marginal prospects as a commercially successful artist, he left the oil company for good and has never looked back.

"At the time, it was the worst decision I could have made," he says. "But I took one of my paintings of some bird dogs to an art gallery in New York, and the man said, 'I can sell this.' That was the start."

Eventually, Proctor was painting mostly bird art "as fast as I could" for sale through high-profile galleries from Texas to Oregon and along the East Coast. His paintings of ibises and egrets, pileated woodpeckers and great blue herons were included in exhibits at the Smithsonian, British Museum of Natural History and other major institutions.

"It was exciting and gave me lots of credibility," he says. "But it wasn't fine art. And I wanted to be a fine artist. So I started entering other types."

And the awards kept coming. Buyers lined up for his painstakingly accurate landscapes and wildlife in their native habitats. His goal, he says, has always been to capture birds as he had seen them in the wild, and to share that experience with others. Despite his growing reputation among art collectors and museum curators, Proctor still wasn't satisfied.

Eventually, he switched to three-dimensional stonework. Now, he's a full-time sculptor, carving figures in Styrofoam and coating them in clay before they're bronzed at a foundry in Salt Lake City.

Incredibly realistic and meticulously researched to capture the essence of their subject, the stand-alone sculptures of children playing on a log, tugging on a rope, running barefoot in the grass and playing with their favorite pets, have captured an audience that Proctor could never have reached with his birds in flight.

Bronze

"I still love the animals, but more and more I'm doing figurative art," he said. "It means I'm a lot more involved in people's lives. I have to know the person in order to put into my work something that says who he was and that he lived."

An elderly war veteran, holding a poppy and tiny American flag on Memorial Day, is one of Proctor's best known pieces. His model was Julian Proctor, his oldest living relative. "Anchors Away," an eye-patched pirate with pistol and cutlass, was inspired by Proctor's boyhood memories of the novel *Treasure Island*. His "Fallen Officer" depicts a grieving wife and daughter surrounded by deputies including one holding the hat of his slain partner.

All reach for the human emotion in their subjects. "It's the little things that are important," Proctor says. For a memorial to a canine officer killed in the line of duty at the Florida Sheriff's Association, he was asked to include such "little things" as a tattoo of Batman on the officer's thigh and a big star on the dog's collar.



"Anybody Home"

"I still love the animals, but more and more I'm doing figurative art. It means I'm a lot more involved in people's lives. I have to know the person in order to put into my work something that says who he was and that he lived."

Other pieces, such as "Helping Hand" commissioned for the Florida Sheriffs Youth Ranch, reflect the same attention to detail. To capture the essence of a deputy walking hand-in-hand with a youthful newcomer, he dressed his lanky model in the 1930s-style fedora and finger-length jacket popular with lawmen when the well-known juvenile rehabilitative facility first opened.

Not that Proctor has abandoned wildlife altogether. It's just that his work no longer consists of two-dimensional game birds flitting across a painted surface. Instead, he portrays a group of children hopscotching over a caravan of Galapagos turtles, a boy playing fetch with his Labrador retriever, a carousel horse in mid-whinny and toddlers pulling two sheepdogs in a wagon.

"I still love those other things, but this is what I'm doing now," he says, pointing to a studio filled with half-finished arms, legs, torsos and other segments of human anatomy. "I've got about a year and a half's commissioned work waiting for me. And I'm happy right here."

For more about Sandy Proctor, contact Peggy J. Proctor, his business manager/representative and wife, at 850-562-0000 or visit his Web site at www.wsproctor.com.

Alabaster



"Bimini"



Can Florida Produce Another Trophy Buck?

By Carolee Anita Boyles
Photographs by William J. Weber

For years, hunters and biologists speculated about whether or not Florida can produce another big buck to rival Clark Durrance's deer from the 1940s.

Durrance took that buck, which for years was the No. 1 deer on the Florida Buck Registry, back in either 1940 or 1941, in Wakulla County. That 25-point non-typical monster, which scored 201 3/8 Boone & Crockett Club (B&C) points, came to light in 1989, after Durrance loaned the mount to a nearby hunting plantation for members to see.

For a long time, when asked if Florida could ever produce another buck to rival Durrance's trophy, biologists replied with a resounding "maybe." But they were very clear on the notion that a deer of that size would only be found in the northern tier of counties where deep clay soils combined with heavily fertilized agricultural crops combine to produce good nutrition for deer.

But like a lot of conventional wisdom, reality overturned what everyone "knew" to be true. On September 25, 1999, Lakeland hunter James Stovall stood the hunting world on its head when he brought a buck with a massive non-typical rack out of Green Swamp West Wildlife Management Area.

For a while there was some question about whether or not Stovall's buck would end up in the No. 2 spot because of a scoring peculiarity, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) biologists eventually put Stovall's buck in the No. 1 spot with a score of 206 B&C points. Stovall's buck likely will continue at the top of the Buck Registry for years as the largest buck ever taken in Florida.

So the question about whether or not Florida can produce a modern trophy buck to compete with Clark Durrance's monster has been answered. The question now is, are other bucks of that size likely, or even possible?

When you start talking about trophy bucks, it's important to define your terms, because what counts as a trophy to some hunters is entirely different from what someone else might term a "trophy

buck." Here in Florida, many hunters consider a trophy one that will find a spot on the Florida Buck Registry.

Established in 1982, the Florida Buck Registry provides hunters with a record of the number and quality of white-tailed deer taken in Florida, and recognizes those hunters who have worked hard enough to bring home a buck that size. The minimum antler score necessary to qualify is 100 B&C inches for typical antlers and 125 for non-typical antlers. As of July 2005, there were more than 4,600 sets of antlers listed on the Florida Buck Registry, which is a pretty impressive list when you consider that Florida isn't renowned for producing trophy bucks.

So what does it take to produce a trophy worth of inclusion on the Registry? Biologists say it takes a combination of three things: genetics, nutrition and age.

A number of years ago, a theory circulated among hunters that genetics was a critical factor in producing big bucks. Countless hunt clubs wanted to "pump up" the genetics of the deer herds on their property by either importing known trophy bucks to breed with native does, or by shooting small bucks with the so-called "spike" gene.

Fortunately, research has shown that neither approach is necessary or desirable. Most deer herds have adequate genetics to produce trophy deer with the right combination of nutrition and age. And the "spike" gene doesn't exist. A smaller, spike-antlered deer is simply a youngster who hasn't had time to mature and produce a full set of antlers. Rather than shooting spikes on sight — as many hunt clubs were doing for a while — biologists strongly recommend letting spikes and other small bucks walk to give them time to mature.

That's a change that's also reflected in Florida hunting regulations. The 5-inch antler rule, which





September 25, 1999, James Stovall took this buck with a massive non-typical rack scoring 206 B&C points from the Green Swamp West Wildlife Management Area. It currently holds the No. 1 spot on the Florida Buck Registry.

At the end of the day, that's what it's all about. Not just harvesting a deer, but managing your deer herd to improve it, and leaving it a bit better than it was when you first started hunting on the land.

the state instituted several years ago, allows the smallest bucks to walk and have time to grow. And on some Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs), the rules are even more restrictive, which sets the stage for hunters to find trophy-class bucks.

This brings us to the matter of age. By letting those smaller bucks walk, hunters are giving them time to grow up and grow bigger antlers. Biologists say bucks need to reach three to four years of age to develop a mature set

of antlers. For that to happen, hunters must be willing to set a high standard for the bucks they harvest, and stick to it — and that standard must be followed over a large enough acreage and for a long enough period of time — in order to be effective.

More and more hunt clubs around the state are developing quality deer management programs that set antler point restrictions that allow younger bucks to walk. As a rule, these management programs also include a carefully regulated doe harvest. If you belong to a hunt club that seriously wants to improve the quality of the bucks on your land, instituting such a management program is the way to go. The first step is to contact the FWC regional office in your area and talk with the regional deer biologist; he or she can help you develop a program that maximizes the deer you have.

Then there's the matter of nutrition. The big reason Florida doesn't produce many trophy-class bucks is just that: poor nutrition. Our infertile soils produce small deer with small antlers because the vegetation the animals feed on is poor in minerals. As a result, under ordinary circumstances, B&C bucks will continue to be rare in Florida. However, hunters can do some manipulation that

improves the nutrition of their deer herd.

First is natural manipulation. Historically, fires burned huge tracts of piney woods in the Southeast, but our increasingly fragmented landscape and urban culture has resulted in the exclusion of fire from many wooded areas. As part of a management program, returning fire to the woods will mean more palatable and nutritious browse for deer.

Supplemental feeding also can improve nutrition. This doesn't mean throwing out some corn for them to eat. Rather, it means carefully planned, fertilized and planted food plots that provide high-quality forage all year round for deer.

Recent research done jointly by the University of Florida and the FWC has given hunters who manage their land for whitetails new tools in the age-old quest for big bucks with great antlers. This research has come up with five seed mixtures comprised of local varieties that work well for Florida soils. These new Florida blends provide a whole new resource for hunters who want to grow big deer.

"There's a big difference between the plots that hunters plant to attract deer for them to kill, and the ones for quality deer management," says Don Francis, a biologist with the FWC who worked on the original research project.

"There's a place for both kinds of plots. The ones that are for quality deer management are much more growing-season or summer plantings, and are grown when the bucks are developing their antlers, and the does are lactating and taking care of fawns. These plots have started to move away from just a hunting point of view, to more of a deer management point of view."

At the end of the day, that's what it's all about. Not just harvesting a deer, but managing your deer herd to improve it, and leaving it a bit better than it was when you first started hunting on the land.

You can get more information on these new forage blends and how to use them to the best advantage from your county Extension agent. Ask for NFREC Extension Report 2005-03, *A Walk on the Wild Side: 2005-06 Fall Wildlife Forage Recommendations for North Florida*.

THE BEST TIME OF THE YEAR FOR GOURMETS

By G. B. Knowles



I love to eat wild game. In fact it is my favorite thing to eat. So autumn is one of my most looked-forward-to seasons. Not only is the weather cool and pleasant but it is time to take to the forest and the field again after a long, hot, summer.

Deer, turkey, quail, squirrel and migratory bird seasons are all open and these creatures provide some of the tastiest of meats.

Some hunters get a jump on the autumn hunting season and shoot rails and gallinules in September. Bow hunters search out deer and turkey during that month. But I gave that up long ago.

September is still too hot, wet and buggy for me to enjoy the woodlands. But that changes when the first cold fronts sneak south, usually in late September or October. It can get downright cold in November and a couple of years ago it approached freezing conditions — even in South Florida — during early December.

Cold weather affects Florida wildlife in many ways. For one thing, it kills off abundant plants and insects that thrive during the heat and rain of summer. That cuts down on cover and food supplies for squirrel, quail, deer and turkey. This lack of cover is one reason most hunters like to see some cold weather.

In Africa, nobody likes to hunt early in the year. I've hunted there in both May and August and the conditions are as different as night and day. During May, the cover is so thick that game is very hard to spot and to stalk. By August, the cold weather has reduced the cover so much that the hunting experience is much better (when it is summer here, it is winter south of the equator).

Here, the results are not as dramatic, but they exist nonetheless. In some parts of Florida, deer rut during the fall. I've not found that to affect their edibility as long as they are properly cared-for after they are harvested.

A lot of people will tell you that Sunshine State white-tails are the tastiest in the country and I tend to share that opinion. Due to our relatively warm winters and heavy rainfall year round, Florida deer do not go through the stress that deer from northern states do. They do not get as big either and do not put on fat the way a Michigan deer will; but that can be a good thing.



One of the keys to making most game palatable is to take off the fat. Depending on how it's cooked, fat can add an unpleasant flavor. If you do leave the fat on the meat, I recommend barbecuing or slow cooking. But I think that is a waste of good deer meat.

Fried venison is a Florida hunting staple. When combined with fresh deer gravy and mashed potatoes or rice, this is a dish few will turn down. Years ago, hunters would only fry the tenderloin and the backstrap of a deer. The ribs were barbecued (or thrown away), the hams were baked and the shoulders and brisket were converted into sausage or stew.

But we know a lot more about deer meat now. I've found that both the hams and shoulders can be turned into frying meat if you butcher them properly. Both have tough tendons and ligaments running through them but if you cut the good muscle tissue away from this tough connective tissue, it is hard to

tell ham or shoulder meat from backstrap.

There will always be some ham and shoulder meat that is too tough for frying or grilling and this can be made into sausage or venison stew.

For those new to hunting or butchering deer, here's some information about preparing the meat and the different cuts.

After harvesting a deer the first trick is to gut and skin it. Gutting a deer can be kind of tricky and should be done with a very sharp knife — very carefully. If you puncture the intestines or bladder, it can ruin the meat. Some knives are made with guards to prevent any possible slippage.

Books, most penned by northern hunters, tell you to tie off the colon of the deer before removing the intestines and bladder to prevent leakage into the body cavity. But in Florida we have a simpler — although maybe a bit grosser — technique. Here, we

insert a knife on the outside of the anus of the deer and continue to cut a circle around the anal opening. In this fashion the entire digestive tract of the deer is removed intact with no chance of contamination.

The best cuts of a deer are the same cuts most favored in domestic animals. The backstrap, something your butcher would call the loin, is a long thick muscle that runs along the backbone of the deer. It is usually removed by cutting it from the backbone in a boneless state. The tenderloins are a similarly shaped muscle though they are not as large as the backstraps.

The tenderloins are found — once all the innards are removed — nestled up against the backbone in the interior of the deer's body cavity. Both cuts are very tender and without much fat — perfect for frying or grilling.

The shoulder is self explanatory and the ham is the thigh of the deer just as it is with a domestic pig.

To fry deer backstrap and tenderloin, you cut the cleaned meat into small medallions and roll them in flour with plenty of *Everglades Seasoning* added. If you don't have this camp staple on hand, salt and pepper will work. The deer meat is then cooked in a very hot skillet.



WILLIAM J. WEBER



Old camp cooks swore by bacon grease or lard as the only cooking mediums but even crusty Florida woodsmen are starting to substitute peanut oil in this day and age. Whatever oil you use, there's little difference as long as one procedure is followed religiously.

Deer meat must never be overcooked (unless you are making something like a stew). If it is overcooked it gets tough and tasteless.

There is a very simple way to keep from overcooking fried venison – when the top of the sizzling medallions begin to ooze red, it is time to quickly turn them. Fry another minute on the second side and they should be perfect.

Just don't throw out that cooking grease. After most of it is drained off, a combination of milk and flour can be added to the pan drippings to make one of the best gravies in the world. One secret to good game gravy is seasoning – lots of fresh black pepper and that ubiquitous *Everglades Seasoning*.

If you have plenty of deer meat, there is another fantastic way to cook it. You take a whole or half backstrap and marinate it in soy, Worcestershire sauce and balsamic vinegar. A couple of hours are all it takes. Marinating overnight can make the taste too strong. Game birds and chunks of deer meat can also be treated this way, then wrapped in bacon and placed on the grill. But the whole backstrap provides an air of elegance to any meal.

After marinating, the whole backstrap goes on the grill. Again, it mustn't be cooked too long. It should be left rare enough that it looks bloody in the middle. Even if it looks too rare, remember that it will continue cooking after it comes off the fire.

Like all grilled, large pieces of meat, it should be allowed to rest for at least 10 minutes before carving. I've served this dish to kids and they much prefer it to pizza and other so-called kid-friendly items.

I could write an entire book about how to cook other fall game! Wild turkey breasts can be fried in the same way as deer meat. Doves, snipe, quail, squirrel and some ducks can also be cooked this way.

However, at Thanksgiving time, many hunters will roast a wild turkey breast, being very careful to pluck the thin-skinned birds.

I shoot a lot of ducks in saltwater and other questionable areas (like phosphate pits) and have found that plucking them and roasting them whole – in the traditional manner – can render them unfit to eat. However, if you skin them and cut the meat off the bones, most of the unpleasant flavors are removed. After the duck medallions are fried, most people mistake them for venison, they are that good.

On the other hand, I love roasted ducks. So if I har-

vest one from a good freshwater lake or pond, I like to roast them whole with a sweet sauce. For this cooking method, you must leave the skin on or they will dry out.

But plucking wild ducks can leave a lot to be desired. They don't end up like a supermarket version – they're loaded with small pinfeathers that are practically impossible to remove.

But we here in the Old South have a technique that solves this problem.

Go to any grocery store and buy paraffin wax used for making candles. Then, boil water in a big pot and add the paraffin, while partially plucking the whole ducks.

When the wax melts, dunk the ducks in the hot water and wax mixture, then put them in a cool place to set up.

When the wax cools, it can be peeled from the ducks and all the feathers, including the pesky pinfeathers, stick to the hardened wax. The result is a duck just like the ones that come from a supermarket.

These ducks make a real treat in a hot oven. But, like most game, don't overcook them.

The fall season offers many opportunities for gourmets, if you know what you are doing. Try these recipes and you won't pass up a saltwater duck or a piece of venison ever again.

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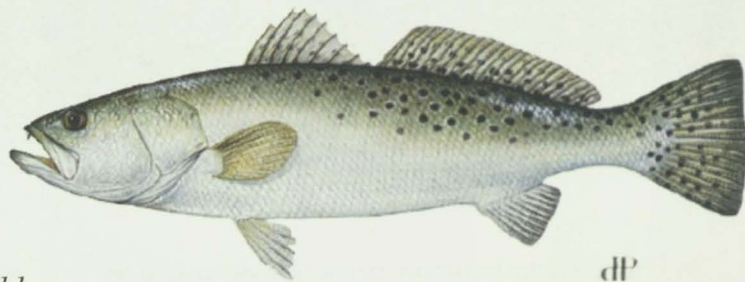
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850.224.6414

Florida Seatrout

By Willie Puz • Illustration by Diane Rome Peebles



TOSH BROWN

One of Florida's most popular game fish, the spotted seatrout sports distinct round black spots on its back and usually has one or two prominent canine teeth at the tip of its upper jaw.

The spotted seatrout is one of the most accessible game fish in Florida. Surveys show that the spotted seatrout is the fish Floridians most want to fish for — more so even than snook and redfish.

Seatrout depend on clear, clean coastal waters and abundant seagrass meadows to provide food and shelter for their offspring. Young seatrout seek protection from predators in heavy grass and mangrove roots along quiet shorelines.

Although seatrouts' size and age at maturity varies by region, scientists say that 12- to 14-inch Florida seatrout generally are one year old and sexually mature. Most 28- to 30-inch seatrout are three years of age. Yet biologists have found 23-inch seatrout in one area of the East Coast as young as one year.

Seatrout from the Indian River,

a brackish lagoon stretching from the Jupiter Inlet to St. Augustine, seem to grow larger and more rapidly than those from other areas. The average Indian River seatrout ranges from 1 to 3 pounds, compared to predominant West Coast seatrout weights of 8 ounces to 2 pounds.

Indian River seatrout attain weights of more than 14 pounds. The largest seatrout ever aged by Fish and Wildlife Research Institute (FWRI) scientists — a 13-pounder measuring close to 34 inches — came from the Indian River and was 7 years old.

Compared to other marine game fish, seatrout enjoy one of the longest spawning seasons. Spawning frequencies can vary from one geographic region to another, depending on water temperatures and salinities. In most

areas of the state, spawning occurs from late April to early October. In warmer regions, it can happen from February to October.

Spawning usually commences with the arrival of mid-70-degree water temperatures. In areas of south Florida such as the Ten Thousand Islands, seatrout can spawn more than a dozen times a year.

Florida seatrout populations started declining in the early 1970s, not only because of deteriorating water quality and loss of seagrass beds, but also due to intense fishing pressure. With the numbers of marine anglers increasing year after year, the take of seatrout keeps increasing. The average saltwater angler harvests 9.7 pounds of seatrout every year.

According to research scientists with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, the seatrout's biggest problem is that its life cycle depends on the same coastal areas humans find most attractive to live in. As much as 70 percent of the state's human population lives in the same coastal counties as the spotted seatrout. In Tampa Bay alone, more than 40 percent of the seagrass beds have been lost over the past 20 years.

Shoreline development along both Florida's east and west coasts has damaged or destroyed much of the habitat seatrout need to live and reproduce. By 1989, the FWRI recorded significant drops in seatrout populations statewide. The ultimate answer to restoring and managing Florida's seatrout stocks for future generations lies with sound ecosystem management including fishing regulations, improved methods for treating runoff and with enhancement programs to replace lost seagrasses.

Florida Seagrasses

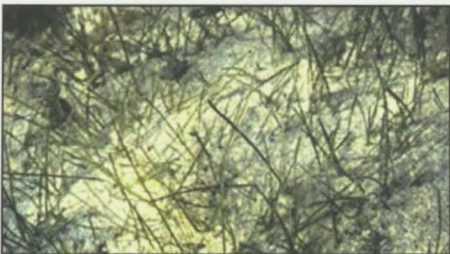
By Willie Puz

NOAA COASTAL
SERVICES CENTER



The long, elliptical leaves of Johnson's seagrass (*Halophila johnsonii*) occur in pairs. This seagrass is not only the smallest at 1 to 2 inches in height, but is also the rarest — growing only in southeastern Florida from Sebastian Inlet to Biscayne Bay.

RONALD C. PHILLIPS



Widgeon grass (*Ruppia maritima*) grows in brackish to freshwater habitats. It has thread-like leaves with a pointed tip. Seagrasses of the *Ruppia* genus occur on all continents of the world and on many islands.

RONALD C. PHILLIPS



Strap-like turtle grass (*Thalassia testudinum*) leaves are broad, flat and dark green. It can grow as deep as 30 feet if it receives sufficient light.

RONALD C. PHILLIPS



Manatee grass (*Syringodium filiforme*) is a favorite food of its namesake, the Florida Manatee. It's also the only seagrass with cylindrical leaves.

Florida's seven seagrass species represent some of the state's most complex and prolific plant communities: widgeon grass, shoal grass, turtle grass, Johnson's seagrass, paddle-grass, star-grass and manatee grass. With a wide geographic range along the coast of Florida, seagrass beds can be found as far as 20 miles north of Ponce Inlet on the Atlantic coast, then reaching around the peninsula as far west as the coast of Louisiana in the Gulf of Mexico.

All seagrasses have shoots or leaves that grow from the base to the top. Eventually, the blades die off naturally or are shed as they become fouled or damaged. Like all plants, seagrasses constantly replenish themselves and can grow a whole new plant from as little as a single seagrass cell. But seagrass beds are not static. Portions die off or crop up in new places every few weeks.

Because seagrasses grow most heavily in clear, warm water, beds tend to expand in the summer and contract in cold weather. The grasses flourish in 70- to 90-degree water temperatures, and die off in water colder than 48 degrees Fahrenheit. Short bursts of cold water are tolerable, but sustained water temperatures in the low 40s can cause major die-offs.

Most seagrass beds or meadows consist of more than one species. Often, two or three different kinds of grass occur in a single grassflat, each with a different turnover rate. For instance, Johnson's seagrass plants can grow and die out in a matter of a few weeks as opposed to turtle

grass, which tends to be the hardiest and most resistant to environmental change. A variety of the seagrasses helps maintain a healthy environment for a diverse group of animals dependent on them for habitats and as a food source. One turtle grass community can live for decades while meadows of Johnson's seagrass and/or paddle grass may survive only six to eight months.

Here are some ways boaters and anglers can help protect seagrasses:

- **Wear polarized sunglasses.**

One of the most important preventatives of all, polarized sunglasses reduce surface glare to help you spot and avoid dark seagrass beds and animals, such as manatees, underwater.

- **Keep track of the tides.**

Even at high tide, some seagrass beds are vulnerable to vessel strikes. Watch for buoys and stakes marking the edges of grassbeds, and stay clear of them. Keep a complete set of navigation charts. When running in unfamiliar waters, charts can help you avoid running aground. Seagrass beds usually are marked in light green with a "Grs" identifier.

- **Operate your boat in marked channels.**

Channel markers keep you out of shallow water. Should you happen to run aground, stop the engine and tilt it. Then pole or walk your boat to deeper water. Never try to motor your way out.

United Waterfowlers - Florida, Inc.

By Andy Lindstrom



CHARLIE HEIDECKER

Two blue wing teals go bottoms up as they dabble for food.

Talk about sport hunting in Florida, and most people set their sights on deer, turkey, quail or even an occasional alligator in season. But we're also one of the top five duck-hunting states in the country, says Newton Cook of Palm Beach County's Tequesta. As the southern terminus of the Atlantic Flyway, we're a mecca for every kind of migratory waterfowl from teal and widgeons to ringnecks, redheads, canvasbacks and pintails.

"The only two we don't have are geese, in any number to speak of, and mallards," says Cook, president of United Waterfowlers-Florida, Inc. (UW-F). "Most of Florida, if you fly over, looks great for ducks because of all the swamps and estuaries."

A self-described voice of Florida duck hunters at the federal, state and local level, five-year-old UW-F boasts about 300 member shooters who lobby for everything from upgrading wildfowl habitat to improving access to public game reserves. Led by volunteer managers in each of the five Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's (FWC) regions, members have helped clean trash from the Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge. They offer shooting seminars at FWC youth summer camps. Their input at state water-management hearings has helped protect such duck hunting hot spots as Lake Okeechobee, the Kissimmee River Basin and the Everglades.

Of major concern to UW-F duck hunters is the growing infestation of hydrilla on the state's lakes and rivers. State water managers would like the invasive plant completely eradicated in favor of native plants and open navigation channels. Sport anglers prefer a moderate hydrilla coverage for improved fish populations. Duck hunters, Cook says, "see a lake completely covered with hydrilla and think they have died and gone to heaven."

A duck hunter for the past 50 years, Cook recognizes the inevitable conflicts between his membership and other interest groups. He also still thrills at what he calls "the joy of wings whistling overhead in the fog at daybreak, a pair of teal soaring through the decoys, those lovable ringers just piling in with abandon."

This past January, Cook returned to the site of his first shoot, Reelfoot Lake in Tennessee, where his father and uncle introduced him to the sport a half century ago. Since moving to Florida, he's had to make a few changes. "I hunted yesterday within 20 feet of a bunch of gators, not one of them less than 10 feet long," he recalls. "They didn't bother me, but they do eat a lot of ducks after you shoot them. Sometimes even the decoys."

Alligators were never a problem up north, Cook says with a chuckle. But Florida hunters have to remain vigilant about other issues as well, including degraded habitat and a steady erosion of their right to public access. Thanks to the work of UW-F and other outdoor sports organizations including Ducks Unlimited and Delta Waterfowl, he says that those concerns are being addressed.

"We worked hard to make the past season a success for Florida waterfowlers," Cook says, pointing to such UW-F lobbying successes as added shooting sites and longer hunting hours. As a result, he says, "Over 2,000 hunters (were able) to access the properties in south Florida versus about 500 in previous years. Right now, I'd say, conditions are good for duck hunters in Florida."

According to state regulations, hunting ducks in Florida requires a state hunting license, migratory bird permit and federal duck stamp. Hunting in a wildlife management area requires an area permit. Many also have hunter limits as well as the number of birds that can be taken. For more information about United Waterfowlers-Florida, write them at 9611 N. US Hwy 1, #337, Sebastian, FL 32958-6363 or visit their Web site, www.unitedwaterfowlersfl.org.

FWC Commissioners Consider Airboat Mufflers and More

The FWC has directed staff to draft a new policy that would require airboats to be equipped with mufflers. According to the FWC's Maj. Jim Brown, flex pipe alone no longer is acceptable to help reduce sound levels. The final hearing on the policy will be at the Commission's Nov. 30 – Dec. 1 meeting in Key Largo.

Commissioners also want staff to hold an additional workshop with stakeholders to discuss implementing a muffler policy, written code of ethics and guidelines for courteous airboat operation. The FWC already has installed mufflers on all of its airboats and established guidelines for courteous airboat operation.

The decision to require mufflers on airboats came after a presentation by Dr. Stewart Glegg, a researcher at Florida Atlantic University Engineering Department, whose group researched airboat sound and produced a report on its findings for the FWC. Other experts have reviewed the report, titled *Measurement and Characterization of Sound Generated by Airboats*, to ensure the study can stand up to public scrutiny and provide fully credible, objective and science-based solutions aimed at reducing airboat sound levels.

Currently, under Florida Statute 327.65, all vessels must be muffled effectively in a reasonable manner. The law also provides additional language that allows individual counties to restrict vessel sound to 90 decibels at 50 feet, but that is not a statewide requirement.

Both the propeller and the engine contribute to the sound airboats produce. At low revolutions per minute (rpm) the engine produces the most sound, but at higher rpms the loudest sound is from the propeller.

This report suggests that mufflers do reduce airboat sound levels at moderate operating speeds, but even muffled boats exceed 90 decibels at maximum throttle. However, airboat operators generally don't run at maximum throttle for long periods.

Researchers examined sound levels produced from different styles of mufflers, including both exhaust and intake manifold mufflers, and differ-

State of Florida Airboater's CODE OF ETHICS

- Respect the right of everyone to enjoy Florida's waterways.
- Learn and observe all State of Florida boating regulations, navigation rules, and vessel safety equipment requirements.
- Recognize that the noise generated from an airboat propeller and engine exhaust system may annoy others.
- Equip the airboat with an approved muffling device and operate it in a manner that will reduce engine exhaust sound levels.
- Operate at a slow speed on or near boat ramps and move away an adequate distance before powering up, and where possible - no power loading.
- Use slow speed to reduce noise near residential and public use areas.
- Be extra cautious to reduce sound levels during nighttime hours.
- Understand that the public will judge all airboaters by the actions of one.
- Protect natural resources and do not needlessly disturb wildlife.

ing propeller designs, operating speeds, and distances from an observer. They believe that each of these components, used together, could provide the needed "incremental improvements" to reduce airboat sound levels significantly.

Historically, most law enforcement agencies have accepted "flex pipe" (flexible tubing that diverts engine exhaust to behind the boat) as a reasonable device for muffling sound. It doesn't muffle as effectively as a traditional muffler, but 20 years ago, nobody really complained since airboats generally ran in remote areas.

"However, times have changed, and the sound of airboats on lakes, rivers and wetlands has become a controversial subject in Florida in recent years," Brown said. "Increased development in these areas, in part, has resulted in increased sound complaints from homeowners and outdoor enthusiasts."

In 2003, the Florida Legislature considered a bill to restrict airboat sound levels statewide to 90 decibels at 50 feet. At the time, the Senate Natural Resources Committee amended the bill and proposed to give the FWC rulemaking authority to adopt a uniform municipal code to resolve the airboat sound issue.

However, instead of the bill moving forward, legislators asked the FWC to host public workshops to get

citizen feedback about airboat sound and work out a non-regulatory solution to the problem. The agency hosted three such workshops in September 2003, and about 300 people attended and provided comments.

Although the meetings failed to produce any consensus on whether Florida needs new airboat sound laws, two proactive themes emerged: airboats should have effective mufflers and airboaters should follow a code of ethics.

A subcommittee of the state's Boating Advisory Council – a group appointed by the governor to advise the FWC and the Florida Department of Community Affairs on boating and waterway-related issues – developed the Airboater Code of Ethics. The council is representative of the boating public, and the subcommittee included individuals from airboat manufacturers, personal watercraft industry, sportsmen groups, the boating public and an affected waterfront property resident.

The FWC is developing an outreach campaign to encourage airboaters to apply new and improved technology for quieting airboats. The campaign also will encourage changes in airboater attitudes and operating procedures to be sensitive to others who live around or share the waterways.

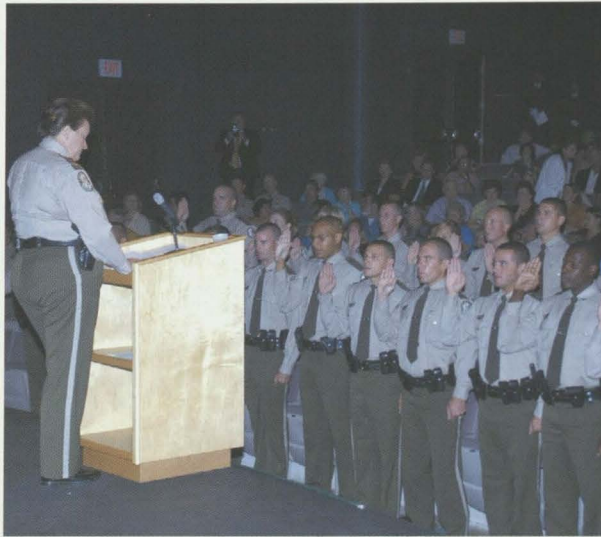
FWC ACADEMY GRADUATES 30 NEW OFFICERS

Thirty new law enforcement officers for the FWC graduated from their 29-week academy and received their badges Friday, September 16.

FWC officers are among the most diversely trained in the country. Their first 22 weeks of training prepare them for certification as law enforcement officers, but they must successfully complete an additional seven weeks to earn their FWC badges.

The additional training focuses on a variety of topics unique to the agency's officers' responsibilities such as the forensic science components of gathering and preserving evidence in conservation law enforcement cases. Other unique training includes capturing dangerous animals, identifying animal tracks, tracking individuals and vehicles in wilderness areas, recognizing illegal commercial fishing devices and traps and off-road night driving.

The new officers and their assignments are:



New FWC law enforcement officers being sworn in by Col. Julie Jones (left).

TIM LEWIS

Edwin O. Harp, Broward County
Kathy E. Sullivan, Miami-Dade County
Dieter C. Iten, Martin County
Christopher Douglas, Okeechobee County
Roberto M. Fernandez, Miami-Dade County
Demone W. Hattaway, Monroe County
Ryan C. Smith, Monroe County
Raul Sanchez, Collier County
Faris L. Livesay, Monroe County
Ryan N. Knutson, Collier County
Chris B. Holleman, Monroe County

North Central Region

Michael S. Heath, Clay County
Benjamin B. Gill, Union County
Michael P. Goodwin, Clay County

Northeast Region

Thomas F. Kist, Lake County
Jason C. Carroll, Osceola County
Emily J. Vought, Brevard County
Justin A. Discenza, Indian River County

Headquarters

Sabra Thornton, Leon County

The FWC plans to begin training its next class of law enforcement officers Feb. 26. Anyone interested in a law enforcement career with the FWC should contact Antonio Kilpatrick at (850) 558-4083 to begin the screening process. The agency is especially eager to recruit more minority and bilingual officers.

Southwest Region

Damon J. Pulaski, Lee County
David F. Brady, Lee County
Ian F. Sweet, Highlands County
Adonious T. Duhart, Polk County
Richard B. Wilcox, Lee County
Scott J. Peterson, Lee County
Algimantas M. Simontis, Lee County
William C. Holcomb, Charlotte County
Darrell L. Henderson, Polk County

South Region

Joseph P. Brooks, Okeechobee County
Aaron C. O'Reilly, Palm Beach County

Florida Receives \$1 Million Grant for Land-Protection Strategies

Dr. Mark Shaffer, the Program Director for the Environment at the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation (DDCF), announced two \$1 million grants for the conservation of high-priority lands in Massachusetts and Florida.

"Both Florida and Massachusetts have been leaders in undertaking comprehensive, statewide planning for wildlife conservation," said Dr. Shaffer. "We are delighted to recognize their leadership through these grants, which will be used to underwrite land-acquisition projects that emerged as top conservation priorities in each state."

In Massachusetts and Florida, Shaffer said, the federally mandated "Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategies" wildlife action plans not only demonstrated

outstanding work in identifying critical, unprotected wildlife habitats, but more importantly were being used to focus available resources on protecting the highest-priority tracts of land. The DDCF grants will be coupled with significant investments of state funds and contributions from local NGOs, thus enabling the purchase of large, intact parcels of habitat explicitly designated as a priority in the state action plans.

The Florida chapter of The Nature Conservancy was the formal recipient of one grant and will work closely with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission to acquire and manage the priority lands.

"These grants serve multiple purposes," said Dr. Joan Spero, president of DDCF. "They provide a strong incentive for partnerships between

public agencies and nonprofits; they reward leading states for engaging in strategic habitat planning; and they demonstrate to other states the wonderful conservation potential of these state wildlife action plans."

The mission of the foundation's Environment Program is to preserve wildlife in the U.S. by supporting efforts to complete the nation's wildlife conservation system. The Environment Program seeks to support key opportunities – such as the development and implementation of state wildlife conservation strategies – that will bring greater focus, clarity and resources to efforts underway across the nation to conserve America's native plants and animals.

Visit www.ddcf.org for more information on the foundation and its Environment Program.

FWC Seeks Additional Feedback on Florida's Wildlife Legacy Initiative

The FWC invites further public comment on the final submission of Florida's first comprehensive wildlife strategy, an action plan for conserving the state's fish, wildlife and natural places. The 500-plus page document, a component of Florida's Wildlife Legacy Initiative, is part of one of the largest conservation planning efforts in the nation. Each state has developed a proactive action plan to conserve wildlife before they become more rare and costly to protect. "Florida's action plan can help us fulfill our responsibilities to conserve wildlife and the places they live," said Thomas Eason, leader of FWC's Species Conservation Planning Section. "The health of wildlife is often an early indicator of disease and pollution that affects us all. Florida's action plan will conserve wildlife and natural places for future generations."

The action plan is a living document. The FWC is committed to reviewing and revising the plan with continued public input. The FWC is planning a

workshop or series of workshops early in the new year and through spring 2006, with a conference in the fall.

"The strategy is a work in progress that will be updated continually, revised and improved, based on the input of all those interested in wildlife conservation," Eason said. "Working together, Floridians are shaping a future filled with wonderful wildlife resources and providing for the enjoyment, recreation and livelihood of its residents and visitors."

The public review process is open Sept. 16 – Dec. 16. Floridians can provide comments and suggestions online at MyFWC.com/wildlifelegacy.

Florida's Wildlife Legacy Initiative is the FWC's long-term approach to secure federal funding, leverage that funding, and launch and revise the conservation strategy. The success of the initiative depends on partnerships. Its goal is to avert future declines of native wildlife with a goal to keep common species common.

FWC Meeting Notes

During its Sept. 21-22 regular meeting, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) approved a new rule to add measurable biological goals as a consideration for establishing or changing manatee protection zones. Commissioners also approved a rule to reflect a statute that requires the agency to "give great weight to existing state manatee protection rules in regions where the goals are being achieved."

Commissioners also directed staff to proceed with adding 34 land parcels, totaling 4,838 acres, to the FWC Florida Forever land acquisition list. The property is adjacent to the Yucca Pens Unit of the Babcock-Webb Wildlife Management Area (WMA).

Concerning marine fisheries issues, Commissioners proposed reducing the daily bag limit from two fish to one fish per person for red grouper harvested by recreational anglers in Gulf of Mexico state waters. FWC will conduct a final public hearing on this proposal during its Nov. 30-Dec. 1 meeting in Key Largo.

Commissioners also will request that the federal allocation of red grouper harvest in the Gulf between commercial and recreational anglers be readdressed in an expedited manner and received a report and public comment on a proposed industry-funded buy-out of excess fishing effort in the Gulf commercial grouper fishery.

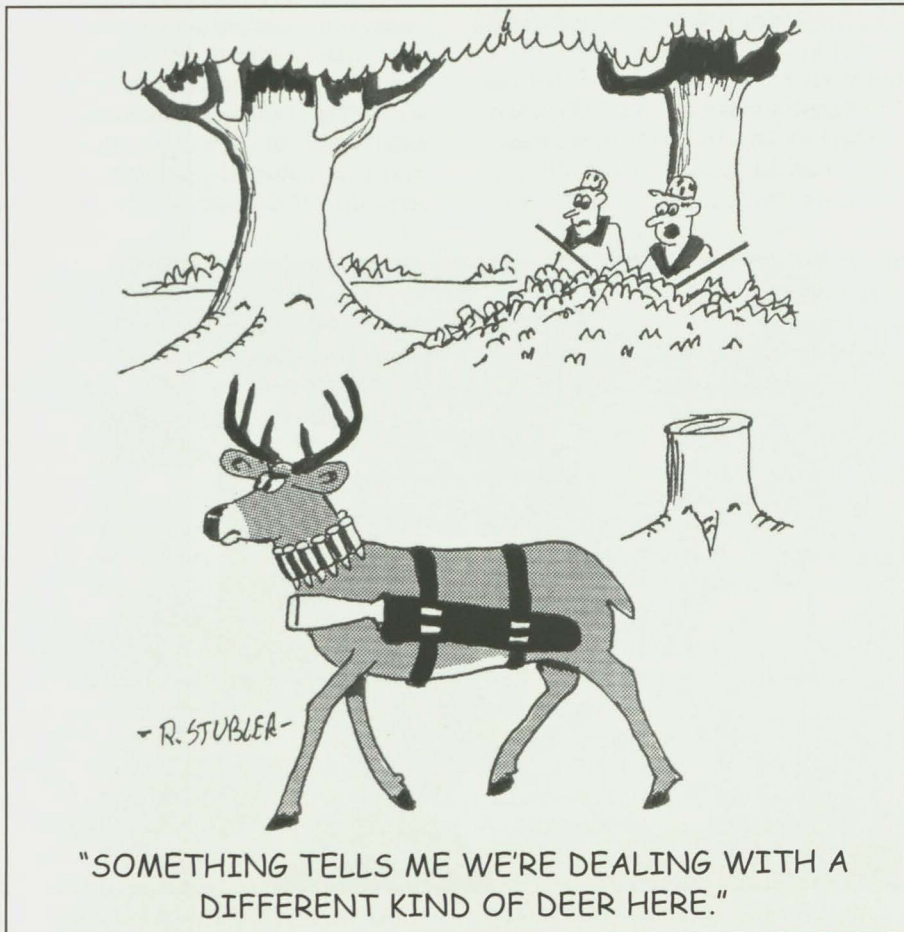
In other marine fisheries action, the FWC agreed to hold a final public hearing during its Key Largo meeting on a rule to establish a nontransferable blue crab limited-entry endorsement for displaced net fishermen who have a valid blue crab endorsement but no qualified landings. This endorsement would allow these fishermen to use up to 100 traps to harvest and sell hard blue crabs.

The proposal also would allow a daily bycatch of 200 pounds of blue crabs in shrimp trawls and stone crab traps. In addition, it would allow a blue crab harvester to obtain permission from FWC's Division of Law Enforcement to allow another person to transport, deploy, pull or retrieve the harvester's traps on a short-term basis for hardship reasons.

Commissioners also conceptually approved Biscayne National Park's Fishery Management Plan for public review, and discussed various state and federal marine fisheries management issues and summaries of multi-agency meeting decisions concerning non-native species in the wild and prevention, eradication and management of several non-native animals.

Commissioners concluded the meeting by unanimously lauding the FWC's law enforcement officers and others who assisted in search and rescue efforts in Mississippi in the wake of Hurricane Katrina.

The next FWC meeting tentatively will take place Nov. 30 – Dec. 1 at Key Largo.

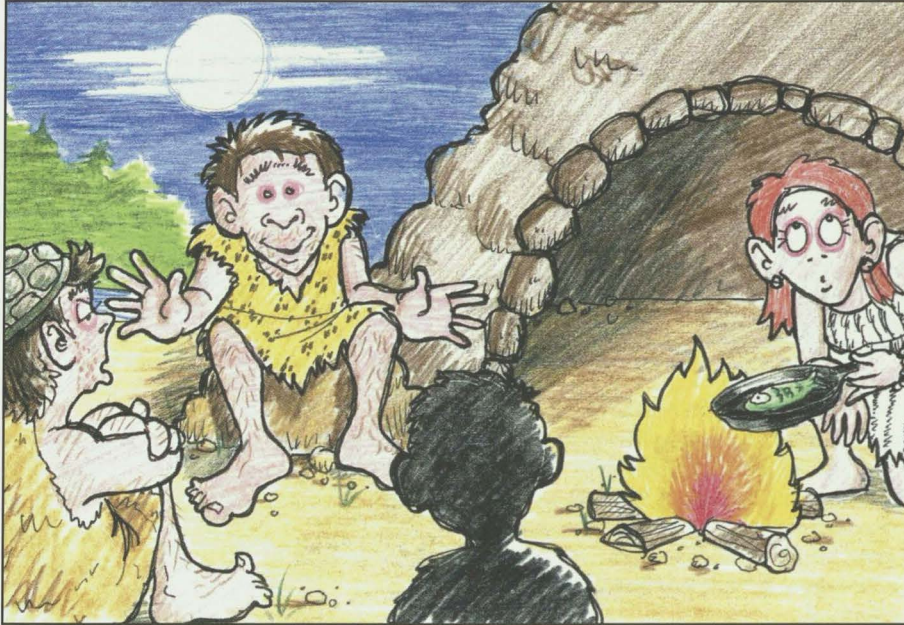


Compiled by FWC staff

Tall Tales and Wild Beasts

A Never Ending Story

By Marc B. Epstein • Artwork by John Papescia



It was a cold December morning on a public hunt area just south of Jacksonville. Three hissing Coleman lanterns showered light over a few hunters as they hunched over a make-shift wooden table. Vehicles were lined up, their headlamps pointing into the forest, and their light beams were peppered with dust and smoke from a warming fire.

From inside a pickup's cab, I heard an excited voice, "I'm tellin' you, you should have seen the size of this fish!" It was well before sunrise and the hunters were beginning the day on a diet of last week's fish tales. I walked to the driver's window to see what the fuss was about.

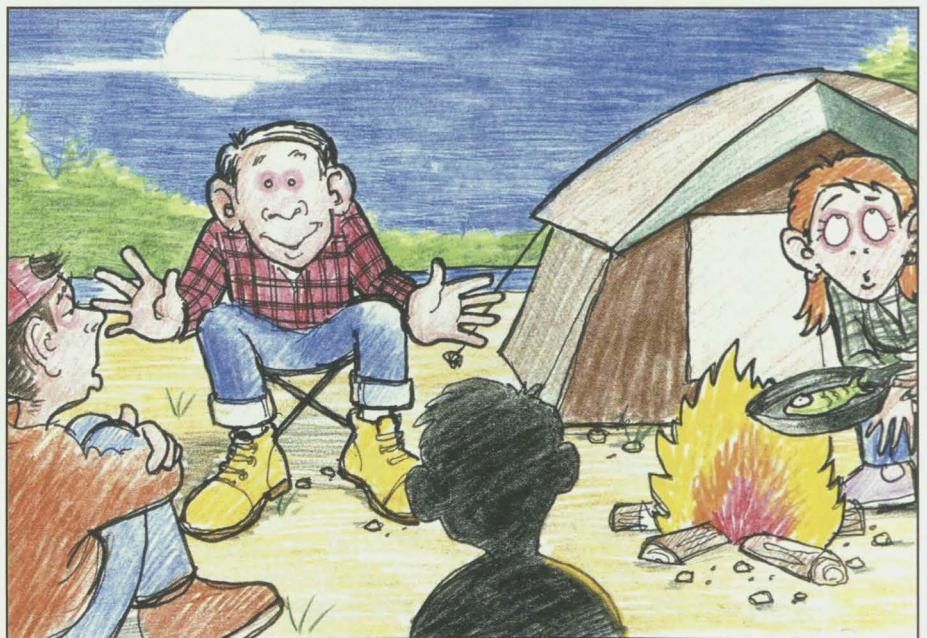
"Hey Marc," the driver said, "You should have seen the bass that Ernest caught last week!" Leaning down to the window, I could dimly see three unshaven men. Their weather-worn and deeply tanned faces were testimony to long hours spent in the Florida sun while their eyes were bright with a thousand tales.

Ernest was holding his left hand so I could see the long, thin cuts between his forefinger and thumb. I exhaled a soft "hmmm?" Ernest rushed to say, "Yep, my reel broke and I had to land it by hand! Well... almost."

As an employee for state and federal fish and wildlife agencies, I have had the opportunity to work at various game check stations for more than two decades. The number of tall tales I've heard would boggle your mind. By and large, my encounters have made me an expert of tall tales and the people who tell them.

Most tales reflect local culture and the imagination of the characters who tell them. While these colorful personalities may proclaim themselves to be some of the most successful sportsmen on earth, they are certainly masters of expressing the most exciting moments of outdoor adventures.

Outdoor experiences can cover a lot of territory — from past years' massive deer to grand-slam blue-water adventures. Outdoor enthusiasts who venture into the wild outdoors, and survive, later weave their tales to entranced listeners. We all love a good story and will follow the teller's tale to the edge of disaster, if necessary.



But the integrity of the story and that of the teller depends on a credible account of a true-life experience. Well... almost.

Sportsmen sometimes cross the credibility line with the tale of the one that got away. Capturing the moment, rather than the beast, inspires some astonishing tales. Figuring out where the invisible credibility line "lies" is a feat in itself.

I often stand fascinated as a teller begins a tale. Body talk is a natural giveaway in this old, old craft. I watch the mounting seriousness in their face and the excitement building in their widened eyes. Their hands move up and down, to and fro, gesturing to indicate the size, movement, speed, direction or magnitude of the beast. Voice inflections enhance the claim — a calm, cool, collected matter-of-fact statement or a loud and exciting close with a final in-your-face, "And that's no lie!"

More often than not, my ears may as well fall off my head. But these stories are well-told. Some are almost believable! I've heard them all — ones about snapped lines and forgotten, wet or broken gear. From, "Where's the bait?" to "All the way to the boat" plus wrong GPS numbers, bent quivers, bad shots, rusty hooks and beyond — even tales of no film in the camera.

I've heard tales of prehistoric fish that lurk in the deep, dark waters of favorite fishing holes. Fish the locals know by name, ones that will strip reels and pull boats to the bottom if too strong a fishing line is used.

The stories that really get my attention are the dark tales of barely surviving wild storms or the savage attack of an aggressively enraged (PO'd) boar hog. Then there are the incredible tales of the unexplained — the ominous, the unidentifiable, such as the strange foot tracks that mysteriously appear near camp sites. These are the tales that bridge generation gaps. They are handed father to son and, perhaps, back again.

I've tried to imagine when the

first tall tale was told and have decided that telling hunting and fishing stories is an ancient activity, perhaps the second oldest profession in the world. The tradition probably began millions of years ago when a prehistoric caveman, protecting the whereabouts of his favorite fishing hole, uttered territorial grunts around a roaring fire on a cold, dark night.

Even today, these tales fuel the camp fire. They make long, cold, stormy nights more tolerable. They inspire a youngster's imagination with midsummer night's dreams of record game fish tail-dancing in frantic escape. Tall tales are timeless — forever old and forever new, always the same, yet different.

But the most compelling part of any tall tale is the uncanny ability

Mention hunting or fishing to a true sportsman and you will notice a glow in their eyes.

of the teller to remember, and describe precisely, every exact detail — just as it happened! I have determined that through eons of evolution, sportsmen have fine-tuned their talent to tell tales without breaking the unspoken ethic, to risk being caught like a worm, telling a lie. Most sportsmen would never be so un-patriotic as to lie. And for those "unbelievers" who feel that sportsmen are liars — well, many a gleaming eye is up to the challenge. There may be confusion at times, but never a provable lie.

Mention hunting or fishing to a true sportsman and you will notice a glow in their eyes. A sportsman's world is the outdoors — they only return home occasionally to sleep or to pay homage. Sportsmen are a special breed who exist for, and dream of, hunting and fishing.

When listening to a tale, they virtually see the surrounding landscape and feel the pulsing waves as a boat runs towards blue water.

They hear the wind as the breath of the forest and know plants by their smell. They hunger for bent rods and the excitement of "fish-on!" Their thirst is for open water, clear and clean, and they can tell the tides by moon phase.

Sportsmen intuitively know when you're lying. After all, sportsmen are cunning and shrewd by nature — how else could they trick a fish into eating plastic, hoax an old tom turkey into loving a piece of slate or coax wildfowl to decoys with whistles and quacks. But invariably, you can detect a dubious tale just by looking into their eyes. Well... almost every time.

Some of us are gullible. Others are skeptical. But we all have inborn gauges of suspicion. On one end of the gauge is reality and the other end is fantasy.

Some tales, however, stretch the entire length of the gauge!

A legend may be based on an actual occurrence. Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*, for example, is one of the greatest "fish" tales ever told. It's an account of the *ESSEX*, a whaling vessel from Nantucket Island that was "stove in" by a giant sperm whale in the cold

waters of the North Pacific. The story of a mad captain hunting a mighty white whale denotes a true tale-teller's technique, but isn't necessarily totally true. And, like Ernest Hemingway's legendary story of a giant blue marlin in *The Old Man And The Sea*, it pales a petty lie. These legends of man and nature portray our pride and passion for all things wild.

As an expert listener of tall tales, I can vouch that true sportsmen are tired of taking a bad rap just because some people can't catch a fish. If you fret that some fables are too far-fetched, you're better off staying home to watch MTV. And, while outlandish tales of tall timbers and wild beasts are a never ending story, many people prefer it stay that way! It's a sportsman's rite, it's their right, and they may be right! So, to all pesky, blabby-mouthed liars, you better beware, true sportsmen are laying it on the line — and that's no yarn. Well... almost.

Nov. 3-4: Rural Folklife Days. Stephen Foster Folk Culture Center State Park; (386) 397-2733; www.floridastateparks.org.
Nov. 4-5: Sebastian River Area Chamber of Commerce Flats Fishing Tourny. Sebastian; (772) 589-5969.
Nov. 4-6: Sugar Cane Festival. Florida Caverns State Park; Marianna; (850) 482-9599; www.floridastateparks.org.
Nov. 5: American Bass Anglers Florida District 106 Tournament. Deland; (386) 846-2861.
Nov. 5: Wetlands Tour. Edward Ball Wakulla Springs State Park; (850) 224-5950; www.floridastateparks.org.
Nov. 5: Pioneer Day. 9 a.m.-4 p.m. Chinsegut Nature Center; Brooksville; (352) 754-6722; MyFWC/chinsegut.
Nov. 5-6: Quicksilver King of the Peak Surf Contest. Sebastian Inlet State Park; www.quicksilver.com.
Nov. 6: 2005 Bass-N-Fools Giblets and Gravy. Clewiston; (954) 475-0248.
Nov. 9-13: 40th Annual Fort Lauderdale Billfish Tournament presented by Mercury Marine. Fort Lauderdale; (954) 523-1004.
Nov. 10 & Dec. 9: Crazy World of Cypress Hay Ride. St. Sebastian River Preserve State Park; (321) 953-5004; www.floridastateparks.org.
Nov. 10: Pine Needle Craft Class. 10 a.m.-noon. Chinsegut Nature Center; Brooksville; (352) 754-6722; MyFWC/chinsegut.
Nov. 11-12: The Caloosa Catch & Release Grand Championship. Sanibel Harbour Resort & Spa; www.caloosacatchandrelease.com.
Nov. 11-13: The Chuck LaMar Mercury Grand Slam Celebrity Fish. Benefits The Pediatric Cancer Foundation; Tampa; (813) 288-6909.
Nov. 11-13: Ocali Country Days. Silver River State Park; www.floridastateparks.org.
Nov. 11-13: Alafia Fat Tire Festival sponsored by the SWAMP Mountain Bike Club. Alafia River State Park; (813) 689-5109; SwampClub.org.
Nov. 12: Myakka Canoe & Kayak Race. Myakka River State Park; (941) 361-6512; www.floridastateparks.org.
Nov. 12: Birding 101 by Eddie White. 9 a.m.-noon. Chinsegut Nature Center; Brooksville; (352) 754-6722; MyFWC/chinsegut.
Nov. 12-13: Florida Sportsman Fishing

Sept. 11-June 30: Bay Scallops Closed Season.
Nov.-Dec.: Spotted Seatrout Closed Season. South Region.
Nov. 1-Apr. 14: Red Snapper Closed Season. Gulf only.
Dec. 15-Jan. 31: Snook Closed Season.

Complete 2005-2006 hunting seasons listed on page 35.

MyFWC.com

Nov. 30: Hurricane season ends.
Dec. 14: Annual Christmas Bird Count begins.
Dec. 21: Winter solstice

Show. Central Florida Fairgrounds; Orlando; www.floridasportsman.com.
Nov. 12 & 17, Dec 15: Experience Old Florida Hike. St. Sebastian River Preserve State Park; (772) 589-5050; www.floridastateparks.org.
Nov. 13: 3rd Annual Coral Creek - Cape Haze Estuary Paddle. Charlotte Harbor; (941) 575-5861; www.floridastateparks.org.
Nov. 15: Florida's Gators by Dr. Kent Vliet. 7-8:30 p.m. Chinsegut Nature Center; Brooksville; (352) 754-6722; MyFWC/chinsegut.
Nov. 16-20: 9th Annual Space Coast Birding & Wildlife Festival. Brevard Community College - Titusville Campus; Titusville; (321) 268-5224; www.nbbd.com/fly.
Nov. 17-20: St. Petersburg Boat Show. Bayfront Center Yacht Basin; St. Petersburg; (954) 764-7642; www.showmanagement.com.
Nov. 18 & Dec. 16: Swamp Tromp: Get Wet and Wild. St. Sebastian River Preserve State Park; (321) 953-5004; www.floridastateparks.org.
Nov. 18-20: Becoming An Outdoors Woman. West Palm Beach; (561) 625-5126; MyFWC.com.
Nov. 19: 7th Annual Tampa Cigar Heritage Festival. Ybor City Museum State Park; (813) 247-6323; www.floridastateparks.org.
Nov. 19: X-Country Marathon, Half-

Marathon & 5K. Alafia River State Park; (813) 672-5320; www.tamparaces.com.
Nov. 19: One Day Tournament. Bradenton; www.bass4bucks.com.
Nov. 20: East Coast Surfing Association. Fort Pierce Inlet State Park; (772) 468-3985; www.floridastateparks.org.
Nov. 24: Annual 5K Turkey Trot. Highlands Hammock State Park; (863) 386-6099; www.floridastateparks.org.
Nov. 26: Paddle-thon. Werner-Boyce Salt Springs State Park; (727) 816-1890; www.floridastateparks.org.
Dec. 1: Project WET. 9 a.m.-3 p.m. Chinsegut Nature Center; Brooksville; (352) 754-6722; MyFWC/chinsegut.
Dec. 3: Annual Cane Grinding Community Gathering. Dudley Farm Historic State Park; (352) 472-1142; www.floridastateparks.org.
Dec. 3-4: Volcom Seacow Surf Contest. Sebastian Inlet State Park; www.volcom.com.
Dec. 6: Wood Storks by Jim Rodgers. 7-8:30 p.m. Chinsegut Nature Center; Brooksville; (352) 754-6722; MyFWC/chinsegut.
Dec. 10: Festival of Lights & Christmas Boat Parade. Fanning Springs State Park; (352) 463-3420; www.floridastateparks.org.
Dec. 10: Introductory Archery Workshop. 10 a.m.-noon. Chinsegut Nature Center; Brooksville; (352) 754-6722; MyFWC/chinsegut.
Dec. 10: 30th Annual Boca Raton Boat Parade. Intracoastal Waterway; Boca Raton; (561) 845-9010.
Dec. 16: Scrub Jay Encounter. St. Sebastian River Preserve State Park; (772) 589-5050; www.floridastateparks.org.
Dec. 16: Chinsegut Night Walk. 6:30-8 p.m. Chinsegut Nature Center; Brooksville; (352) 754-6722; MyFWC/chinsegut.
Dec. 17: Seminole Hard Rock Winterfest Boat Parade. Fort Lauderdale; (954) 767-0686; www.winterfestparade.com.
Dec. 18: East Coast Surfing Association. Fort Pierce Inlet State Park; (772) 468-3985; www.floridastateparks.org.
Dec. 18: First Fruit Picking. Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Historic State Park; (352) 466-3672; www.floridastateparks.org.
Dec. 23: Wagon Ride Through a Preserve. St. Sebastian River Preserve State Park; (772) 589-5050; www.floridastateparks.org.

NOVEMBER

- Greater sandhill cranes arrive to winter
- White pelicans begin migrating south to Florida
- Peak of deer rut in central and north Florida
- Bald eagles begin their nesting season
- Florida manatees head south to warm water sites when temperatures drop; seasonal Manatee Speed Zones change on Florida's waterways

DECEMBER

- Nesting season begins for ospreys in south Florida
- Goldfinches plentiful in north Florida
- Snail kites in south Florida begin courtship
- Opossums breed now through midsummer
- Right whales can be observed off the east coast, north of Sebastian Inlet
- Bald eagles start hatching in north Florida

2005-2006 FLORIDA HUNTING SEASONS

NORTHWEST ZONE

Archery Oct. 15 - Nov. 13
Deer-Dog Training Oct. 29 - Nov. 17
Muzzleloading Gun Nov. 18 - 20
Antlered Deer and Wild Hog* Nov. 24-27 & Dec.10-Feb.15
Antlerless Deer Dec. 17 - 23
Fall Turkey** Nov. 24-27 & Dec.10-Jan.15
Quail and Gray Squirrel Nov. 12 - Mar. 5
Special Archery/Muzzleloading Gun Feb. 16 - 26
Spring Turkey*** Mar. 18 - Apr. 23
Bobcat and Otter Dec. 1 - Mar. 1
Rabbit, Raccoon, Opossum, Coyote, Nutria, Skunk, Armadillo and Beaver – Year round.
 * in areas where hogs are considered game animals
 ** bearded turkeys or gobblers only, except for Holmes County
 *** Holmes County - Mar. 18 - 20 only

SHOOTING HOURS:

Shooting hours for resident game birds and game mammals: one-half hour before sunrise to one-half hour after sunset; except during Spring Turkey Season when shooting hours will be one-half hour before sunrise until sunset on private lands.

SOUTH ZONE

Archery Sept. 10 - Oct. 9
Deer-Dog Training Oct. 1 - 20
Muzzleloading Gun Oct. 15 - 23
Antlered Deer and Wild Hog* Oct. 29 - Jan. 8
Antlerless Deer Nov. 5 - 11
Fall Turkey** Nov. 12 - Jan. 8
Quail and Gray Squirrel Nov. 12 - Mar. 5
Spring Turkey Mar. 4 - Apr. 9
Bobcat and Otter Dec. 1 - Mar. 1
Rabbit, Raccoon, Opossum, Coyote, Nutria, Skunk, Armadillo and Beaver – Year round.
 * in areas where hogs are considered game animals
 ** bearded turkeys or gobblers only

CENTRAL ZONE

Archery Sept. 24 - Oct. 23
Deer-Dog Training Oct. 1 - 20
Muzzleloading Gun Oct. 29 - Nov. 6
Antlered Deer and Wild Hog* Nov. 12 - Jan. 22
Antlerless Deer Nov. 19 - 25
Fall Turkey** Nov. 12 - Jan. 8
Quail and Gray Squirrel Nov. 12 - Mar. 5
Spring Turkey Mar. 18 - Apr. 23
Bobcat and Otter Dec. 1 - Mar. 1
Rabbit, Raccoon, Opossum, Coyote, Nutria, Skunk, Armadillo and Beaver – Year round.
 * in areas where hogs are considered game animals
 ** bearded turkeys or gobblers only

Wildlife management area regulations may differ from the dates on this poster.

2005-06 Florida Hunting Regulations Handbooks and Wildlife Management Area Maps and Regulations are available at County Tax Collectors' Offices, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission regional offices or online at MyFWC.com/hunting.

MyFWC.com

MIGRATORY GAME BIRD SEASONS

SHOOTING HOURS:

- Shooting hours for migratory game birds: one half hour before sunrise to sunset
- Shooting hours for dove during the first phase: noon to sunset
- Shooting hours for dove during the second and third phase: one-half hour before sunrise to sunset
- Shooting hours for crow: one-half hour before sunset to one-half hour after sunset

SPECIES	SEASON DATES	DAILY BAG LIMITS	POSSESSION LIMITS
Rail and Common Moorhen:	Sept. 1 - Nov. 9		
King and Clapper Rails		15	30 (singly or in aggregate)
Sora and Virginia Rails		25	25 (singly or in aggregate)
Common Moorhen		15	30
Special September Duck Season	Sept. 24 - 28	*4	*8 in the aggregate
September Canada Goose (Lake Seminole, Jackson County)	Sept. 3 - 28	5	10
Mourning and White-winged Dove	Oct. 1 - 24 Nov. 12 - 27 Dec. 10 - Jan. 8	**12	**24 in the aggregate
Snipe	Nov. 1 - Feb. 15	8	16
Woodcock	Dec. 17 - Jan. 15	3	6
Crow	Aug. 13 - Oct 30, (Sat. & Sun only) Nov. 11 - Feb 18	None	None
Duck and Coot	Nov. 19 - 27 Dec. 10 - Jan. 29	***6 ducks 15 coots	12 30
Canvasback & Pintail	Nov. 19 - 27 Dec. 10 - Dec. 30		
Youth Waterfowl Days	Feb. 4 - 5		
Canada Goose (Lake Seminole, Jackson County)	Nov. 19 - 27 Dec. 1 - Jan. 30	5 5	10 10
Snow, Blue and Ross' Geese (north and west of the Suwannee River)	Nov. 19 - 27 Dec. 10 - Jan. 29	15	None

* Bag/Possession limits are 4/8 teal and wood ducks in the aggregate, no more than 2/4 of which may be wood ducks.

** Bag/Possession limits are 12/24 mourning and white-winged doves in the aggregate, no more than 4/8 of which may be white-winged doves.

*** Six duck limit shall consist of no more than 4 mallards (no more than 2 of which may be female); 1 black duck; 1 mottled duck (Florida duck); 1 fulvous whistling-duck; 1 pintail (only during the pintail season); 1 canvasback (only during the canvasback season); 2 redheads; 2 wood ducks; 3 scaup; and 4 scoters. All other species of duck (except harlequin) may be taken up to the six duck daily limit. Taking or attempting to take brant, harlequin ducks, canvasbacks (except during canvasback season) and pintail (except during pintail season) is prohibited.

Wildlife Alert!

REPORT FISH AND WILDLIFE LAW VIOLATORS

Those who violate Florida's fish and wildlife laws are stealing from all of us. Follow the law to ensure that fish and wildlife resources can be enjoyed by future generations.

Do your part by reporting violations to a local FWC law enforcement office at **1-888-404-FWCC (3922) or #FWC and *FWC on a cell phone.** To report online, visit **MyFWC.com/law/alert**

You may be eligible for a cash reward and can remain anonymous.

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